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ARIFURETA SHOKUGYOU DE SEKAISAIKYOU
世界最強
OVERLAP

Arifureta Shokugyou de Sekai Saikyou - Volume 02

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Chapter 1

In a cave surrounded in darkness, without a hint of light. Silence, where not even the sound of insects creeping could be

heard, in a place where the hand of mankind has not reached, an extremely natural place. Though a natural cave, there was something irregular, something extremely unnatural about it.

It was impossible to not think this place formed accidentally underground. But there was one decisive factor which made one understand the center of this closed off cavern was unnatural.

It was complicated and exquisitely carved, a small circle engraved in the ground. Humans called it a magic formation. Surely someone of the modern age who saw this kind of magic formation would faint, their eyes stolen by the 3 meter diameter formation. The magic formation was too much.

A magic formation this large would be treated as a national treasure, yet it was faded, dusty, and had a melancholic atmosphere. It had not been used for 10 years, 100 years, perhaps longer. It was like a legendary sword, waiting for the qualified person to show up and pull it from the stone.

A change suddenly appeared in this magic formation after so long. Along the grooves where the magic formation was carved, crimson light began glowing, first faintly, then stronger, stronger, stronger.

In a single instant.

The light popped. The magic formation glittered a vivid crimson, and the dark cave lit up. This grand scene was mysterious. Anyone here would imagine a paranormal existence suddenly appearing.

However, the light disappeared after some time, and two shadows appeared from the magic formation…

「The hell」

Words which completely destroyed the solemn atmosphere. When the light completely calmed down and the cave returned to

darkness, the one who spoke had an expression one of disappointment from the very bottom of his heart. Several months ago, by the malice of a classmate, he fell to the Abyss in 【Orcus Great Labyrinth,】he was the traveler from another world, 【Earth】— Nagumo Hajime.

Hajime passed through 100 floors in the depths of 【Orcus Great Labyrinth,】a place deeper than the generally accepted 100 floors of the dungeon. There, he discovered a message from Oscar Orcus, a "Liberator" of this world, 【Tortus.】He stepped onto a teleportation magic formation that should have allowed him to reach the ground.

After falling into the Abyss, Hajime went through a daily survival challenge on the verge of life and death, and he had missed the land above ground. Simply put, when he stepped onto the magic

formation, he believed he would open his eyes to see the sunlight pouring on him and the wind brushing his cheeks.

However, only rocks greeted his view, and having looked at them for months on end, he was considerably displeased… on reflex, he responded in the Kansai dialect.

Kui kui, something pulled at the hem of Hajime's clothes who was disappointed and cursing. 「What?」 he said as he looked at a short girl who went up to the pit of Hajime's stomach.

Golden hair, bright, ruby red eyes and an atmosphere reminiscent of the moon. Thin, pink lips and skin as white as porcelain. Her eyes looked a little sleepy. She was a girl with a beautiful face, like a bisque doll, whose entire body seemed to be an act of God. She had been rescued by Hajime, having been sealed in the Abyss. Furthermore, she was the Vampire Princess who forcibly took Hajime up the stairway to adulthood — Yue.

Yue cheered Hajime up with a relaxed gaze. 「… Secret passage… usually hidden.」

「Ah, ahh, is that so? I guess so. There's no way the direct path to the abode of a traitor would not be hidden, right.」

Hajime was embarrassed to not have noticed something so obvious and scratched his head.

He poured magic into the storage type artifact, "Treasure Warehouse," and pulled out a lamp made of Green Light Stones. Hajime and Yue, though the dark was not an issue because of their skills and magic, using this lamp was a means of deceiving himself

as they moved ahead.

Yue giggled understanding his feelings. She teased him. But for his mental health, he ignored her and began shining the light throughout the cave.

「Hm? That's…」

He noticed a recess within the cave from the green light. In the wall there were beautiful vertical lines carved with a hepatgon as large as a person's palm placed at eye level. There were different patterns drawn at each corner, and one was a symbol he had become accustomed to for the past few months. In short, it was the crest of Oscar Orcus.

Hajime approached the wall and pulled out the ring of 【Orcus Great Labyrinth,】which acted as proof that he had conquered it, from "Treasure Warehouse." A high pitched tone, followed by gogogo, the rumbling of the walls opening left and right, sounded as a passage further inside appeared.

Hajime and Yue nodded to one another and stepped forward. They advanced down the path without a fork.

On the way, there were some doors and traps with seals on them, but they were released with Orcus's ring. The two, though cautious, advanced without losing momentum, and…

eventually saw light.

It was the light of the outside world. A positive light. For Hajime, it was several months, and for Yue, as much as 300 years, it was a light they could not help but desire.

Hajime and Yue, having found it at last, froze on reflex and looked at each other. They smiled as their restrained emotions swelled and overflowed, both running toward the light at the same time.

The light gradually grew as they approached. They could feel the wind blowing from outside. The air was not stagnant like in the Abyss. It was a cool, refreshing wind after so long. Hajime felt the “air was delicious” having not sensed it for so long. Hajime an d Yue jumped into the light at the same time…

And saw their long-awaited ground.

This was the hell above earth, a land made into an execution ground. Magic could hardly be practiced beneath the cliff, and there were many powerful demons who had taken the lives of many. It was 1.2 kilometer deep, 8 kilometers wide from east to west, and approximately 900 meters wide from north to south; to the west was 【Guryuen Desert,】and to the east was 【Hartsenna Sea of Trees.】This was a scar on the earth which divided the north from the south. People had a name for it.

【Raisen Gorge.】

Hajime and Yue were currently outside a cave at the base of 【Raisen Gorge.】Though they were at the bottom, the sun poured over them from above. The fragrance of the surface mixed with the wind, tickling their noses.

Compared to anywhere else they could have been transported, this place was, without a doubt, the surface.

In a daze, while looking at the sun above, Hajime and Yue gradually smiled. Even Yue, who was expressionless by default, was smiling broadly.

「… We're back, aren't we…?」「… Mm.」

Hajime spoke with a tone which contained various feelings. Yue, too, answered, her voice full of emotion. Their words barely seemed like a real conversation to them. They looked away from the sun and glanced at each other, hugging with all their strength.

「All right—!! We're finally back!!」「Mm!!」

While holding Yue who had a smaller stature, Hajime spun around. Even as they traveled, they stumbling on the uneven ground, they could not stop smiling.

At last, the two settled down. They were…

Completely surrounded by demons.

While the demons were groaning from all directions, Hajime sighed

as he complained.

「Haa～ These guys are really dense, aren't they…? They really should give us a little more time.」

While pulling out Donner & Schlag, Hajime tilted his head, saying 「Right, we can't use magic here.」 This was an important characteristic of 【Raisen Gorge】 recalled from when he was studying after being summoned.

「… I know. Even so, I'll fight with all my power.」

The reason magic could not be used in 【Raisen Gorge】 was because magic was dispersed into the air. Of course, Yue's magic was no exception.

However, Yue, the Vampire Princess, in addition to wielding powerful magic, also possessed external magic storage, the Magic Crystal Series.

In other words, Yue was able to annihilate them before her magic was dispersed.

Yue snorted and came up with a daring idea while Hajime simply smiled wryly at her.

「Sheer power… how's your efficiency?」 「… About 10%.」

In order to use Beginner Rank magic, the amount of power necessary was that required for Advance Rank magic. The range

was considerably reduced as well.

「Ah～ then I'll take care of things. Yue, just focus on defending yourself.」

「Uu… but,」

「The right person for the right place, got it? This place is bad for a magic user, so leave it to me.」

「… Mm… okay.」

Yue reluctantly withdrew. Though they had reached the long awaited surface, she had difficulty accepting that she would be excluded from their battles. Her pride took a hit, and she sulked in displeasure.

While looking at Yue sulk, Hajime abruptly fired Donner with a wry smile. Without looking at the enemy, he pointed his gun and immediately pulled the trigger.

Without noticing the sudden attack, the demons' heads burst without resistance. Only the echo of a gun could be heard in the surroundings. All demons in the area froze, not understanding what happened.

Even if only 10% of a person's magic could be used here, he could still use "Lightning Clad." His rail gun was fired without a problem. Hajime smiled boldly to the stunned demons.

「Now then, the demons from the Abyss and you guys, who's stronger… Let's see.」

Hajime dropped his hips slightly and pulled his right leg back, showing half his body forward, holding his guns at the ready in a cross in front of his chest. The left elbow of his artificial arm was thrust forward, and Schlag was gripped slightly below Donner. He poised himself easily to handle attacks from the front and back, and his left arm was postured so it would be easy to use the gimmicks within at any time. This was the gun kata Hajime had honed in the Abyss.

Severe killing intent filled his eyes. It was as cold as frost, as deep as Hell.

When the demons saw his eyes, they unconsciously stepped back. They felt it by instinct. You must not oppose this “monster.”

An ordinary person would pass out, being crushed by this violent pressure. One demon, unable to endure the tension, jumped out as it roared.

「Gaaaa!!」

At that moment, a crimson light flashed through the air, and the demon could not even react as its head was blown away. The demon’s corpse slid along the ground powerlessly. With Donner emitting a white smoke, Hajime’s eyes gazed at the surrounding demons; he did not even show any sign of caring about the other demons. A torrent of murderous intent blocked all thought.

Rather than a fight, it had become a one-sided slaughter. The demons could not run even one step; it was as if it were

natural that they explode. Their corpses filled the land as far as the eye could see in only 5 minutes.

Holstering Donner & Schlagg, Hajime tilted his head while looking at the mountain of corpses.

「… What's wrong?」

「No, it's a bit disappointing… The monsters in Raisen Gorge are known for their brutality; I thought we were in a different place for a moment.」

「… Hajime is a monster.」

「That's mean. Well, it just means the demons in the Abyss were too strong.」

Hajime responded while shrugging his shoulder and averting his eyes from the demon corpses without interest.

「Now then, I think we can climb this cliff… so what should we do? If we think of Raisen Gorge, one of the seven Great Labyrinths should be in the area. We can also go to the Sea of Trees and search that area while we're at it.」

「… Why the Sea of Trees?」

「No, well, after getting out of this canyon, I'd rather not cross the desert, right? If it's the Sea of Trees, there should be a village nearby as well.」

「… Mm. True.」

Yue nodded to Hajime's proposal. Looking at how weak the demons were, it seemed like 【Raisen Gorge】itself could not be counted as the Labyrinth. In that case, there should be an entrance somewhere. If they used Hajime's "Air Walk" or Yue's Wind Magic, they could easily climb the cliff; either way, they would need to investigate 【Raisen Gorge,】so there was no reason to oppose this plan of action.

Hajime poured magic into the middle finger of his right hand. From "Treasure Warehouse," he pulled out pulled out the magically driven 2 wheeler, "Stiefe." It had a black body following the American style and was very large. Since it did not use combustible fuels such as gasoline like on Earth, and the wheels were driven directly by magic, it drove as quietly as an electric vehicle.

Though there was a certain sense of a man's romance hearing the engine, he only knew the simple mechanics and not the complexities of the engine structure, so he could not easily reproduce it. Since speed was dependent on the quantity of magic utilized, in 【Raisen Gorge,】his magic efficiency took a plummet, and it could not be used for long.

Hajime readily sat atop Stiefe. Afterward, Yue jumped up and clung to his waist while sitting sideways behind him. Her graceful hands lightly pressed against his abdomen as Hajime began pouring magic into Stiefe.

【Raisen Gorge 】was a cliff heading from east to west. There were barely any side roads, and they quickly reached the Sea of Trees.

Not seeing any obvious places for the entrance to the Labyrinth, Hajime and Yue moved on without worrying. Stiefe, in truth, had a transmuting function at its base, so it could run without problem on level land or bad roads; normally speaking, the ground at the base of this cliff was not good for a typical motorcycle.

「This feels great, Yue.」「… Mm.」

Cutting through the wind, the scent of the air and soil mixing, and the light of the sun, they enjoyed this drive for two thoroughly. Yue lightly entrusted her head to Hajime's back with a joyful expression. Despite all this, Hajime had been restlessly moving without releasing the handlebars as he kicked off crowds of demons trying to attack.

A while after driving Stiefe, they heard a demon roar a short distance away. It had an overbearing feeling. It was clearly different from the demons at the bottom of this ravine that they had confronted up until now. And it would be only 30 seconds before they met it.

Driving Stiefe around the curving cliff, he saw a large demon. It looked similar to the Tyrannosaurus in the Abyss, but it had two heads.

Even so, what caught Hajime and Yue's attention was not the double-headed dinosaur but a girl with rabbit ears jumping about with a half-crying face.

Hajime stopped Stiefe and looked suspiciously at the rabbit-eared

girl who was about to be eaten.

「… What's, that?」 「… Rabbit Clan?」

「Why here? Do they typically live here?」 「… Never heard.」

「Then was she dropped here as a criminal? Isn't this place used for executions as well?」

「… Bad rabbit?」

Hajime and Yue had their heads tilted as they talked in a carefree manner about the rabbit-eared girl. They had no desire to help her. This was especially true since Raisen Gorge was a place used to execute people. Rather than worrying about a complete stranger, they felt it bothersome and had no desire in getting involved.

Hajime had also had a large change in mindset. If it was the Hajime before, whether he could help or not, he would at least have shown an intent to help.

His reasons were different from the time withYue. He did not feel sympathy for this rabbit-eared girl, and Hajime found no merit in helping her. He did not even react to her cry for help. This world was a prison for Hajime, and he intended to desert the majority of it save for the exception with him now.

But the rabbit- eared girl detected the carefree Hajime and Yue. After being blown away by the double-headed Tyrannosaurus and falling into the shadow of a rock, she quickly stood back up on her

hands and feet to run away, staring at Hajime in the meanwhile.

Once again, the demon swung its claws at the rock where she was hiding, blowing it away. She groaned as she rolled on the ground, escaping from the fierce attack using the momentum of the attack… straight toward Hajime and Yue.

Though there was some distance between them, the desperate shout of the rabbit-eared girl echoed throughout the canyon, reaching Hajime.

「Foun' joo!! I fidally foun' joo～～! Help me～! Hiii, I'll die! I'll die! Help me～!」

She desperately ran with a flood of tears flowing down her face. Right behind her was the demon trying to eat her. At this rate, the girl would be eaten even before she could reach the two.

As one would expect, being directly asked for help like this, even Hajime would…

「… "Finally found you?" She's saying strange things. And a monster train? Don't get me involved.」

「… Mm. Nuisance.」

As expected, they had no desire to help. Even if she desperately screamed, they were not disturbed. Rather, they felt it bothersome. The rabbit- eared girl, seeing Hajime avert his eyes, realized he did not want to help; she began crying even more.

「Wait～ Don’t leave me behind～! Please～!!」 The rabbit-eared girl cried out even louder.

Even so, Hajime did not feel any motivation whatsoever; at this rate, the rabbit-eared girl would definitely get eaten. That I s, if the double-headed Tyrannosaurus did not go around the rabbit-eared girl and directed its killing intent at them.

The double-headed Tyrannosaurus went between Hajime and the rabbit-eared girl and roared, full of killing intent.

「「Guraaaaaa!!」」

Hajime reacted to this. 「Hah?」

At this moment, his existence was denied. The creature was only looking at its prey. Still, Hajime’s body reacted to the blood lust.

The double -headed Tyrannosaur caught up with the rabbit-eared girl and opened one of its jaws. Sensing its presence behind her, the girl looked behind to see countless sharp fangs closing. 「Ah, it’s over…」 she despaired. However, the next moment,

Dopan!! A dry explosion she had never heard before resounded throughout the canyon as the afterimage forming a line could be seen between her rabbit ears, erect from her fright. One of the demon’s heads was pulverized right before her eyes.

One of the creature's heads crashed to the ground, and it tipped over having lost its balance. The double-headed Tyrannosaurus crashed into the earth.

The impact blew the rabbit-eared girl away, straight toward Hajime.

「Kyaaaa! H, Help me, please～!」

While falling toward Hajime who was before her eyes, she reached out to him. Her outfit was in tatters, and places a woman should hide were clearly visible. Her crying face looked terrible; it was a scene where a man would, without a doubt, catch her.

「You stupid? Stop getting ahead of yourself.」

However, it was Hajime Quality. In an instant, he poured magic into Stiefe and retreated, magnificently evading the girl.

「Ehh!?」

The rabbit-eared girl's shocked cry could be heard as she fell down, twitching with her face down and her arms and legs fully extended. She had not passed out, but it was difficult for her to move while enduring the pain.

「… What an unfortunate rabbit.」

Yue looked at the shameful sight of the rabbit-eared girl over Hajime's shoulder and spoke her cruel words lightly. Meanwhile, the other head of the double-headed Tyrannosaur had bitten and eaten its destroyed head, regaining its balance. It now looked like a

normal Tyrannosaurus from the side.

The normal Tyrannosaur, with fury and anger in its eyes, roared. The rabbit-eared girl jumped up at the sound. She was unexpectedly stout or, perhaps, stubborn. She desperately tried to stand up with tears in her eyes, and, with unexpectedly quick movements, hid behind Hajime.

She desired to rely on Hajime to the bitter end. She would have died on her own, and she understood Hajime had done something to destroy one of its heads, so it was an expected action.

Even so, she seemed to trust Hajime, strangely enough. It was her first meeting with this boy of the Human race which typically looked down on her as a Demi-human. Normally, when someone was chased by a demon, others would run away. That he did not do so, she was probably convinced it would be safer to remain by Hajime than to run away alone…

Hajime recalled the rabbit- eared girl shouted 「I found you」on this first meeting, so he was obviously dubious. And because this girl was extremely strong-willed and clung to him, he undoubtedly wanted to curse.

「Hey, you damn gag existence. What the hell are you doing, using me as a sh ield without permission? Don't drag us into this. Be brave and do a suicide attack!」

The rabbit-eared girl grasped the hem of Hajime's coat, and she would never release it! From the bottom of his heart, Hajime glared

at her in irritation. Yue, who was sitting on the back seat, was pushing the rabbit-eared girl with her leg.

「N, no way! Y, you'll abandon me if I let go, right!?」

「Isn't that natural? Why should I help an unfamiliar and annoying rabbit?」

「An immediate reply!? What about this is natural! Even you should show some kindness now! Don't you feel guilty about abandoning a helpless, beautiful girl!」

「I left kindness back in the Abyss. And don't call yourself a beautiful girl!」

「Th, then, if you help me… I, I'll listen to any request you have?」 The rabbit-eared girl leaned closer with a blush and upturned

eyes. It was a cunning, truly cunning action. If her face was not sullied by her tears and running nose, she would surely be a beauty. Rather, looking at the dirty girl more closely, she, who called herself beautiful, actually had a good appearance. She was a pretty girl with blue-gray hair and eyes. The average man would fall for her, whether she was dirty or not.

But the man before her eyes was hardly ordinary.

「Don't need it. Actually, don't bring your filthy face so close, it's dirty.」

He was terrible wherever he went.

「F, filthy!? The first thing you call me is filthy!? That's too much! I strongly objec—」

「Gugaaa!」「Hii! Help～!」

The moment she tried to argue with Hajime, the Tyrannosaur cried out and leaned forward to charge.

The rabbit -eared girl raised a miserable shriek while forcing herself between Yue and Hajime. Yue, annoyed, kicked the girl, trying to get her off Stiefe while the rabbit-eared girl desperately clung to them crying 「I'll never let go!」shoe marks appearing on her cheek.

As if feeling ridiculed by the scene, the Tyrannosaur glared at the three with more fury than ever.

Immediately after it started its charge, Hajime raised his hand and aimed the muzzle at the demon's forehead. In less a second, he had finished aiming and firing. With a single gunshot, he had pierced the demon between its eyes.

After convulsing for a moment, the Tyrannosaurus fell over, the earth trembling as it hit the ground.

「Heh?」The rabbit-eared girl let out an idiotic noise feeling the vibration and timidly looked at the Tyrannosaur's fate from beneath Hajime's armpit.

「It's dead… That Di-header, in a single blow…」

The rabbit-eared girl opened her eyes wide in surprise. It seemed the double-headed Tyrannosaurus was called "Di-header."

She stiffly stared at the remains of the Di-Header while being kicked by Yue and clinging to Hajime. For a while now, her long rabbit ears were brushing Hajime's eyes. In a gloomy mood, he dropped his elbow on her head.

「Hebu!!」

Letting out a groan while shouting 「My head～ My head～」the rabbit-eared girl used her hands to hold her head while writhing on the ground. After coldly gazing at her, Hajime poured magic into Stiefe and began advancing as if nothing had happened.

Sensing this, the rabbit-eared girl suddenly jumped up with a frightening vigor and said, 「I won't let you get away～!」and clung to Hajime's waist. She really was resilient.

「Thank you so much for helping me! I'm from the Rabbit Clan, one of the Haulia. I'm Shia! Please, save my family!」

She was also quite shameless.

Hajime glanced at the clinging rabbit-eared girl. And so, right after getting out of the Abyss, he was thrust right into another troublesome matter. With that, he let out a sigh.

The girl's, Shia's, voice echoed through the gorge as she begged him. Her family, too, was in trouble. It was clear why she was so desperate. Yue, who was kicking Shia who clung to Hajime, stopped unintentionally.

「Please! Please help me!」

Seeing Shia desperately beg him, Hajime felt it could not be helped and shrugged his shoulders. Perhaps her desires reached him, when Shia had a shining face as she looked at him, Hajime… used "Lightning Clad."

「A ba ba ba ba ba ba ba ba ba ba A ba ba ba!?」

Though he had adjusted the voltage and current such that it was non-lethal, she would likely be unable to move for a while. Shia's rabbit ears straightened out and her hair was smoking. When he finished using "Lightning Clad," she fell down and convulsed.

「Well, how should I put it. I'm sure you'll manage somehow. Good luck. All right, let's go, Yue.」

「Mm…」

Hajime gave here these encouraging (?) words and began pouring magic into Stiefe again. However…

「Y, you won't escape～」

Shia stood up like a zombie and clung to Hajime's leg. Surprised, Hajime stopped putting magic into Stiefe.

「Y, you're like a zombie. Though it was non-lethal… how did you get up? That was scary… 」

「… Mm. Creepy. 」

「Uu～ What's with that! I also have something to say! Kicking and electrocuting me, that was mean! I'm protesting, you know! As an apology, help my family! 」

Shia lightly pointed out a demand while expressing her anger. She was fairly relaxed, unexpectedly. When she came here, her sturdiness was at an abnormal level. In a small voice, she tearfully said 「If there was any mistake, the future would change 」while looking at him, oddly anxious.

Or perhaps, though Hajime was trying to shake her off, while speaking and behaving oddly as if she knew the future, she was trying to pull some interest from him. Rather, from the start, she seemed deeply attached to him. But even with that, this rabbit-eared girl, covered in blood stains, would not release him… he would rather not experience horror here.

Hajime reluctantly decided to listen to Shia's story.

「Honestly, what is it? I'll hear you out for now, so let go. Actually, stop wiping your snotty face with my coat. 」

When he said he would at least listen, Shia's face brightened as she casually wiped her dirty face on his coat. What lovely etiquette,

Hajime thought in irritation. 「Hagyun!」she screamed out as she crouched after Hajime hit her.

「Y, you hit me again! Even my father has never hit me before! Look at my beauty, and these proportions… could it be, you like men… so that's why you refused my advances back there! That must be Afuun!?」

Because he heard something improper, Hajime gave her a heel-drop to her head, veins floating aplenty on his forehead.

「Who the hell's a homo, you annoying rabbit? Now that you mention it, how did you know that reference? You and Yue, where the hell do you learn these things…? Well, I'll let it go for now. I don't know what this seduction gag you're talking about is from, but the reason I refused your invitation is because there's a prettier girl beside me. Just look at her dignity, I can't understand where you get the nerve to try to seduce me.」

While saying that, Hajime stole a glance at Yue. Hearing this, Yue covered her blushing cheeks with her hand while wiggling her body. Her hair reflected the sunlight, and her bisque doll-like skin was dyed a faint red; she was capable of charming anyone without fail.

She looked different from when they first met. She now wore a pure white dress and black mini-skirt decorated with frills, and over it, she had a long coat with a blue line running from top to bottom. Her legs were adorned with knee socks and short boots. They were all made from Oscar's clothes and demon materials by Yue herself. They were extremely durable and could easily protect the wearer.

Hajime was wearing similar clothing composed of black and red with a black coat with red lining. This, too, was made by Yue. At first, she made him white clothes so they would have a pair look; however, it was embarrassing to make him all white with his white hair. Hajime felt unpleasant wearing it, so they settled with his current style.

「Uu～」Shia could only flinch when she saw Yue's beauty. Still, Hajime needed to be corrected, since his opinion was still

subjective. In short, when seen objectively, Shia would not lose in terms of how beautiful she was.

She had long, straight blue-gray hair tinted with a blue hue and clear blue eyes. Her pale skin, eyebrows, and hair, gave her a mystical quality. Her arms and legs were slender, and her rabbit ears and rabbit tail were soft and round, twitching in an unbelievably cute manner. Any animal lover would shed tears of gratitude.

Above all… there was one thing she had that Yue lacked. That was to say, Shia had large breasts. They were especially emphasized because her clothes were ragged. They were a (lethal) weapon which would not stand to have their presence noted. They shook whenever she moved, strongly insisting on their own presence.

In short, it was not odd that she was confident in her style and figure. Rather, hajime was the abnormal one. Before he changed, he would likely have cried 「Rabbit ears!!」and jumped at her…

Even so, Shia, whose pride was damaged, said the forbidden words.

「B, but… my chest wins! That girl, she's flat!」

- She's flat!
- She's flat!

- She's flat!

The daredevil rabbit-eared girl's shout echoed through the valley. Yue, trembling in embarrassment, got off Stiefe, her face hidden beneath her bangs.

「Ah～」Hajime muttered as he looked to the sky and made a gesture of prayer. Rabbit-ears, please rest in peace…

As an aside, though Yue looked thinner when dressed, she did have them. They were definitely not cliffs like those found in【Raisen Gorge.】

Shia's rabbit ears trembled like a small animal confronted by a wolf as Yue's voice barely reached her.

- Have you finished your prayer?

- I might forgive you if you apologize
- …

- I don’t want to die! I don’t want to die! 「“Storm Emperor.”」

「Ahh—!!」

A tornado suddenly appeared and swallowed, Shia, launching her into the sky. Her screams echoed throughout the valley. After 10 seconds, she fell in front of Hajime and Yue.

Her head was buried as she convulsed. She was completely a gag character. Certainly, she did have a good figure, but she was completely unfortunate. Her clothes were torn, and she had suffered many times, she was nothing but garbage by this point. Her figure now would make one fall out of a century-long love.

「A job well done!」 Yue thought as she wiped her sweat away and walked to Hajime. She sat on the bike and quietly stared at him.

「… Do you like them big?」

It was truly a problematic question. If Hajime said 「*YES*! 」then he would suffer the same fate, so that alone must be avoided.

「… Yue, size is not important. What matters most is the

partner.」「…」

Rather than giving a decisive *YES* or *NO*, Hajime gave a vague response. Truly indecisive. Yue narrowed her eyes in consent then silently sat behind him.

In truth, Hajime was in a cold sweat, trying to find a topic to break the silence, but nothing came to mind.

However, he immediately noticed Shia trying to free her head with both hands as her body trembled. He tried to use that as a conversation starter.

「She's moving… definitely a zombie. Her endurance really is above average…」

「… Mm.」

After a long silence, she responded, giving him a sense of relief. At the same time, Shia managed to pull out her mud-covered head.

「Uu～ Don't look at me so cruelly. I didn't want to be seen like this…」

With tear-filled eyes, Shia dusted off her ragged clothes and muttered quietly as she crawled closer to Hajime and Yue. It truly was like a horror film.

「Haa～ What's with your endurance? That's not normal… what are

you?」

Despite Hajime's caution, Shia sat up to tell of her predicament. She sat before the two with a serious expression. Well, it was too late for a number of things for her, but…

「Allow me to reintroduce myself. I am Shia Haulia of the Rabbit Clan's Haulia Family. The truth is…」

Finally, Shia began telling her story.

Shia Haulia, the rabbit girl, lived quietly in a tribe of around one hundred people within【Hartsenna Sea of Trees.】The Rabbit Clan, though excellent with secretive actions and hearing, they were weaker than the average Demi-human, and had a tendency to be ranked lower amongst Demi-humans. They were generally kind and disliked fighting, treating their companions as if they were family. Furthermore, they tended to have excellent figures, different from an Elf as they had a hint of cuteness and, when caught by people of the Empire, they were often enslaved as popular commodities to be held.

In the Haulia Family, a girl was born with an abnormal characteristic. The Rabbit Clan typically had dark blue hair, and this child had gray-blue hair. Furthermore, she was able to directly manipulate magic unlike the typical Demi-human who could not utilize magic in the least, and she had a certain unique magic on top of it all.

Of course, the family was greatly puzzled. A child like that could never be born to the Rabbit Clan, no, to any Demi- human. It would be normal to discriminate against her, since she was born with powers similar to a demon; however, she was born into the Rabbit Clan which had deep familial ties. As such, the Haulia Family

decided to raise her.

However, if her existence was found out by the other Demi-humans in the country 【Felbergan,】she would very likely be executed. They despised demons that much as deadly enemies.

For that reason, the Haulia Family hid the girl and raised her in secret for 16 years. However, her existence was recently found out. Because of that, the Haulia Family escaped to the Sea of Trees before getting caught by 【Felbergan.】

There were also those who decided to go to the northern mountainous areas, since there were more cultivated resources there. Though uncivilized, it was better than being caught by the Empire or a slave trader.

However, their attempts to escape were crushed by the Empire. They were immediately found by soldiers from the Empire when they left the Sea of Trees. It was unknown whether they were training there or not, but the Haulia Family encountered a group on the scale of a company and could do nothing but run south.

Though the men tried to hold the soldiers off to let the women and children go, there was a clear difference in battle potential between the trained Empire soldiers who could use magic and the gentle, peaceful Rabbit Clan. Before they knew it, half of them had already been captured.

They desperately tried to run away to avoid annihilation and arrived at 【Raisen Gorge. 】The Empire would not come here

where magic could not be used. Until everything was over, the family would wait here. They were betting their lives on whether a demon would attack them or the Empire withdrew first.

However, the Empire did not try to withdraw at all. Rather, they waited at the entrance, positioning themselves at the only easily accessible path. They were waiting for the rabbit people to come out when attacked by demons.

Sure enough, demons attacked. They could not simply surrender to the Empire, though. Between escaping into the canyon and fleeing from the demons, the Haulia Family chose to escape into the canyon. They jumped into the depths…

「When I came to, only forty of sixty people were left. At this rate, we'll be annihilated! Please, help us!」

Shia's initially unfortunate atmosphere completely changed to a bitter expression as she begged him.

「Hee,」 Hajime nodded in consent after hearing the story. Shia was the same as Yue and Hajime, an exception in this world. Her abnormal body strength was due to her ability to manipulate magic, even if it was being done so at an unconscious level. She was the same as Yue, having ancestral powers.

Hajime felt he had found answers to the doubts he held before, feeling somewhat refreshed; he looked straight into Shia's eyes and gave a frank response.

「I refuse.」

Time stopped. A silent atmosphere appeared.

Shia looked at Hajime, clearly not understanding what he said. When Hajime began putting his leg over Stiefe, she finally came to and complained with a frightening force.

「W, wa, wait! Why! If you think of t he flow of things, you should be saying, 『How pitiful! Don't worry! I'll do something about it!』 with a reliable smile or something! I should have known it would be like this! You even ignored such a pretty girl! Eh, you're ignoring me and leaving again!? I won't let you～」

Shia jumped up to cling onto Hajime's leg again. Despite her serene atmosphere a moment ago, she was now back to her shameless rabbit self.

Glaring at Shia who showed no sign of releasing his legs, Hajime could only sigh.

「You know… what is the merit in helping you?」「M, merit?」

「Being chased by the Empire, banished from the Sea of Trees, you're nothing but a seed of trouble. There's only demerits here. If you escape from the gorge, what next? Won't you just get caught by the Empire? Or will you run to the mountains? Then what? Rely on me again? You're just going to ask me to protect you from the Empire and escape to the north, right?」

「Uu, th, that's… but!」

「The two of us have our own road to travel, we don't have the time to do something this troublesome」

「N, no way… But I know I saw you protecting me!」

「… You've been talking like this for a while now. What is it…? Something about your unique magic?」

Seeing Hajime not break despite her crying, Shia shouted about a 「strange future.」 For some time now, she had been saying odd words, which made it even more curious as to why she acted alone.

He did not particularly say he wanted to know, but given the flow of the conversation, it had arrived at this point. Hearing Hajime's question, Shia seemed dazed for a moment then began speaking in a rushed manner while gesturing.

「Eh? Ah, yes. It's called "Premonition," and it lets me predict a future. If I make this choice, what will happen later on? Something like that… and when danger approaches, I can see the future. Well, the future isn't certain… r, right. I, I'll be useful! With "Premonition," I can see all kinds of danger. I saw it earlier. I saw you helping us. Actually, it was because I saw you helping me that I found you!」

Shia explained "Premonition" further; according to her explanation, when it was activated, she saw the future as a result of a choice that was made. This consumed an enormous amount of magic. She would immediately dry out. Furthermore, whether she wanted it or not, it could activate automatically when she was in danger. Though it consumed a large amount of magic as well, it was only one third the normal consumption.

Apparently, Shia left where she was at before, asking what will happen if she met Hajime. With this choice in mind, she saw Hajime defending her and her family. As such, she took independent action in such a dangerous place to look for him.

「If you have such an amazing magic, then why did they find you? If you can predict danger, then you wouldn't have been found in Felbergan, right?」

When Hajime pointed this out, Shia had an uneasy expression. It was a bitter smile, or perhaps a grievance, it was a mysterious expression. And she answered with that expression carrying on in her tone.

「… The future will change if I work hard. At least, that's what I believe. But working hard isn't enough, the future didn't change… I always thought about it afterward. If I can't change the future into something I want, even when I work hard, then I need something else…」

「… You.」

What kind of feelings did she have seeing the future? If she could see a future filled with hope, then she could happily receive the morning after night falls. But what if she saw a tragedy? How could she not scream with the time limit approaching?

Even if it was difficult to see, she was hiding her tension and gloom, and she probably wanted to scream even now. Rather, she likely cried on countless occasions, this rabbit-eared girl before his eyes.

Her family was chased out of the Sea of Trees, many of her family members were wounded, died, were captured. No matter how harshly he had treated her, she still begged him for help as if crazed, her life truly was “hard.”

Shia Haulia had already staked the destiny of her clan on the future named Hajime.

Hajime had a difficult expression to describe as he looked at Shia. To live, for the future he desired, he struggled desperately. His purpose was to find a clue to return home, and he could not stray from this path. Like that, Hajime’s heart seemed to be set.

Even so, Hajime was about to decide to ignore Shia, even if he had to drag her along… but Shia received covered from an unexpected place.

「… Hajime, take her along.」「Yue?」

「!? I knew it from the start, you’re a nice lady! I’m sorry for calling you flat Afuu!」

Hajime was confused by Yue’s words while Shia was excited and had stars in her eyes. With her words, however, she crumbled from Yue’s slap. The serious atmosphere from before was gone. It was definitely not on purpose. This shameless girl got ahead of herself.

Yue gazed at her and gave her reason. 「… Guide around the Sea of Trees.」 「Ah, I see.」

【Hartsenna Sea of Trees】was enveloped in a dense fog which drove the senses mad excluding Demi-humans, and, without a doubt, it would be reassuring to have a demi- human as a guide. Though he would not hesitate to enter the Sea of Trees regardless, he was still not sure how long it would take to find his way through. Rather than capturing a demi-human and find the path that way, it was more welcome to have one guide the two willingly.

But Hajime hesitated due to how much trouble Shia brought with her.

Seeing Hajime hesitate, Yue looked straight at him. She answered without holding back.

「… It's fine. We're the strongest.」

They were the words Hajime said to her when leaving the Abyss. The world would not hold them back. They would defend each other as the strongest. Hajime could only smile wryly hearing these words.

With the help of demi- humans, it would be much easier to navigate the Sea of Trees. It would be best to avoid trouble with the empire as well as Demi-humans. He was not the sort to poke his head into troublesome things, and he would avoid any problematic existences as best he could. As for those who block his path, he decided to "kill them."

「Right. You're right, Yue. Use what can be used. Kill anything in

our way. That's all there is to it.」「Mm.」

Hajime gently pat Yue's head, and Yue responded as always. With a somewhat sweet atmosphere appearing, Shia cried out with tears in her eyes,「Could it be they forgot me?」Hajime glanced at her.

「Hey, rejoice, shameless rabbit. I am allowing you to guide me through the Sea of Trees. Your payment is your life. I'm sure you have no complaints.」

There was no mistake in his words, he was completely a yakuza. But, still, it did not change that this was the promise of someone strong who can single-handedly kill powerful demons in the Gorge, whicih convinced Shia that she had passed the turning point which would bring hope to her family's future.

「I, I won't complain at all! Thank you! Uu~ Thish is gread~ Really gread~」

Shia cried with joy. However, she immediately stood up, having no time to lose.

「U, um, it's good to be working with you! S, so what should I call you two…」

「Hm? Right, I never gave you my name… I'm Hajime. Nagumo

Hajime.」

「… Yue.」

「So it's Hajime-san and Yue-chan.」

Shia repeated their names several times. Yue objected, dissatisfied.

「… Say san. Shameless rabbit.」「Fue!?」

Shia was puzzled by Yue's typically commanding tone, having thought Yue was younger due to her appearance, but if she knew Yue was a Vampire far older than her, she would surely apologize while prostrating herself. Yue seemed not to like Shia at all. Though she did not understand why… but every time Yue glanced at Shia's body parts she disliked, she felt an unreasonable anger.

「Come on, get on back, shameless rabbit.」

Hajime, used to Yue's quick mind and gave simple instructions to Shia. Shia was confused, since there were no two-wheeled forms of transportation that moved by magic in this world; however, since Shia understood it was some kind of vehicle, she timidly sat behind Yue.

Though it had a tandem seat made of demon skin, since Yue was small, there was enough space for all three of them. Shia was surprised by the softness of the seat and leaned forward against Yue, pressing her weapons on her back.

Yue shook feeling something soft and plump and dexterously slipped in front of Hajime. With Yue's small physique, she nestled

herself in Hajime's arms without trouble. She could not endure the feeling of the lethal weapons hitting her back. Hajime smiled wryly understanding Yue's thoughts as she entrusted her weight to him with a bitter expression.

「Eh? Why? 」Shia did not understand what was happening and clung to Hajime's waist with a happy expression. Hajime, as usual, poured his magic into Stiefe and drove along. If someone were to ask if he reacted to this, it would be a lie to say no.

Without noticing the conflict in Hajime and Yue's mind, Shia asked a question over Hajime's shoulder.

「U, umm, even though going faster is better… is this a vehicle of some kind? What is it? And Hajime-san, Yue -san, you two use magic, right? You shouldn't be able to use it here… 」

「Ahh～ I'll explain on the way. 」

With that said, Hajime increased his magic output and accelerated to the left. It moved smoothly despite the poor terrain, and Shia, over Hajime's shoulder, screamed,

「Kyaaa～! 」as the ground seemed to flow by them.

Shia clung tightly to Hajime and shut her eyes at the impossible speed at the base of the ravine, though she eventually grew accustomed to it and gradually became excited. She would always shout out whenever Hajime took a turn or avoided a large rock.

On the way, Hajime explained why Yue could use magic, why he could drive on Stiefe, as well as the fact that his arm was an artifact. Shia could only look at him in astonishment.

「Eh, then you two can also directly manipulate magic and use unique magic?」

「Yeah, something like that.」 「… Mm.」

For a while, Shia was stunned in surprise; suddenly, she buried her face into Hajime's shoulder and began sobbing.

「… What is it now? Noisy one minute, then depressed, and now you're crying… You really are emotionally unstable.」

「… Beyond help?」

「Who's beyond help! What do you mean by that! I'm normal! It's

just… when I think I'm not alone… I feel happy…」

「「…」」

She had thought she was the only one who had abilities similar to a demon. Her family raised her for 16 years despite the danger she brought. They even ran out of the Sea of Trees for her sake; it was their affection. Even so, she could not help but feel alone because she was different from others.

Yue became lost in thought. It seemed her expressionless face was becoming more pale. Hajime somehow understood her feelings. Yue

most likely had similar circumstances as Shia.

Both of them were able to directly manipulate magic and use a unique magic with no one similar during their time.

However, there was one definite difference between them. While Yue did not have family who loved her, Shia did. For that reason, Yue had a complex emotion mixed in with her envy. Since they both saw each other as “kindred spirits,” she had even more complex emotions.

Hajime stroked Yue’s head. Hajime, who was raised in the prosperous country of Japan, received affection from his parents, and, though he had no “kindred spirit,” his situation was hardly comparable to Yue’s who was a queen. He had nothing he could say to comfort her; he could only show her that she was no longer alone.

Though Hajime had completely changed, he still had a kindness for those he cared for. Rather, if he had not met Yue, even that may have disappeared from him. Yue was the one who stopped Hajime from falling to a path of heresy. Because she was there, Hajime felt he could retain his humanity. As proof, he would protect his promise with Shia. He would protect the Haulia Family from the Empire and have them guide him through the Sea of Trees.

Feeling her anxiety, Hajime clumsily comforted Yue, and her body unconsciously pushed back as she entrusted her back to Hajime even more. She was like a cat purring as her owner pet her.

「Um～ did you forget about me? You could say 『You worked hard. You're not alone anymore. We're by your side!』 or something like that, and then I would cry! I need to be comforted, too, you know! I want to be spoiled! Even so, you've gone off in your own world! I'm lonely! Please, take me, too!」

「「Shut it, you shameless rabbit.」」「…Fine… gusu…」

Shia whimpered, her ruckus leading to Hajime and Yue yelling at her on reflex. However, they left a crying girl alone and went off in their own little world; it could only be called cruel.

Furthermore, they yelled at her. Shia was truly pitiful. Still, she was strong. 「I first need to make them call me by name～ They're important comrades I've finally found! I won't let them go～」 she thought as she settled on her new goal.

Meanwhile, Yue and Hajime heard a yell echo in the distance. There were many demons before them.

「! Hajime-san! We'll arrive soon! That demon, it's… close! It's near where father and the others are!」

「Stop shouting in my ear. I can hear you. Hold on tight, I'm speeding up.」

Hajime poured more magic into Stiefe, accelerating it even further. The earth flew past them.

While Stiefe lit up crimson from the large magical supply, taking a small detour for about 30 seconds before drifting where many demi-humans were being attacked.

Screams could be heard echoing throughout 【Raisen Gorge.】 Shadows with rabbit ears were running from rock to rock, ducking down desperately; given the numbers, there were about twenty people. This was far different from the forty people mentioned by the person in question.

In the sky, flying demons, which were rare, even in the Abyss, gazed at the frightened rabbit people. The creatures were similar to wyverns with a wing span approaching 3 to 5 meters, sharp fangs and talons, and a thorn at the tip of their long tails, looking much like a morning star.

「H, Hyveria…」

Shia's trembling voice reached him from over his shoulder. The wyvern creatures were called "Hyveria." There were six of them trying to catch the rabbit people while circling the skies.

Finally, one took action, diving toward a large rock where some of the rabbit people were, attacking with its tail. A deafening sound roared as the rock was crushed and the rabbit people came out of hiding while screaming.

As if saying, 「I've been waiting for this!」 the Hyveria began opening its jaw to devour its helpless prey. It was aiming for two rabbit people in its attack. What it left was the lower half of one and an unmoving child the eaten tried to cover.

Seeing this, the other rabbit people could only feel despair. They did not know when another of their family would fall prey to the Hyveria, but that was not to be.

The reason was because there was a person contracted to help them, a monster who escaped from the Abyss.

Dopan!! Dopan!! Two flashes appeared as gunshots echoed throughout the canyon. One shot hit the forehead of the attacking Hyveria; it fell on the other side of two crouching rabbit people, producing a cloud of dust.

At the same time, the rabbit people turned around to see a separate Hyveria with its arm missing, blood pouring out as it writhed about in pain. Some of them lost their strength and fell over.

They had been so focused on the first, they did not notice the other approach. Of the two bullets, the second had taken a Hyveria's arm, causing it to lose balance.

「Wh, what is…」

At that time, a man covering a child muttered to himself while looking between the Hyveria shot in the head and the one struggling in pain.

Furthermore, when he heard a gunshot, he noticed a crimson flash. Suddenly, the Hyveria collapsed, causing the earth to shake.

Seeing their comrades dead, the other Hyveria in the sky roared in

rage, louder than it ever had before.

Kiiii, a sound similar to a jet, could be heard, causing the rabbit people to cower. They turned around to see a black vehicle with three people on it approaching at high speeds as it jumped into the air.

Of the three, one was someone they knew all too well. In the morning, she had suddenly disappeared; she was the one they were looking for in the first place. She felt it was her fault her family was in the state they were, and she tried to conceal it with her cheerfulness, but she could not help but express her anguish.

The girl's rabbit ears fluttered through the air as they fell through the sky at high speeds, her screams echoing throughout the vicinity. They looked at the unbelievable spectacle. The Hyveria roared, trying to catch the incoming prey, but the three simply flew past its eyes.

The girl waved at them from the black vehicle, a cheerful expression on her face. The rabbit people looked at her as if unable to believe what they saw.

「Everyone～ I've called for help～!」

When they heard her voice, they finally realized she was real.

「「「「「「「「「「Shia!?」」」」」」」」」」

Immediately after confirming the safety of her family, Shia stood up

in the back seat and waved happily, irritating Hajime as he continued triving Stiefe at high speeds.

It was fine that Shia was happy, but so that she would not fall from Stiefe which was running at high speed, Shia had entrusted all her weight to Hajime, her lethal weapons sending a heavy yet pleasant sensation to the back of his head. Because of that, his aim shifted, and he did not kill the second Hyveria.

Hajime gripped Shia's clothes as she bounced up and down so as to stop her. Noticing this, she tried to question him, but, even if she could not see his face, she noticed the atmosphere and spoke timidly.

「U, umm, Hajime-san? What's wrong? Why are you gripping my clothes?」

「… If you're so energetic that you bother me in combat, I thought I'd give you a job.」

「J, job… Wh, what should I do?」

「Simple, just go in front of those starving demons. Easy, right?」
「!? Wh, what are you, ah, don't lift me～ Don't swing me～」 Shia struggled with a nervous expression and was easily lifted by

Hajime who had more than 10000 in his strength stat.

Hajime drifted Stiefe, steering with one hand, using the additional centrifugal force to throw Shia at the Hyveria in the sky, no questions asked.

「Die! Shameless rabbit!」「No～～!!」

The rabbit-eared girl flew through the air. Shia's scream echoed through the gorge. The rabbit people, seeing this impossible spectacle, shouted 「Shia!!」as they looked to the sky frozen while she flew toward the Hyveria.

The girl's screams as she soared through the air reached their ears.

「Ahhhh～ Help me～ Hajime-san～!」

Hajime passed by the rabbit people that started running to her and caught her splendidly as he stopped Stiefe. After that, he threw her aside.

「Afuu! Uu～ You should be gentler～ I want better treatment～ You should treat me as importantly as Yue-san～」

Shia protested while sobbing. It was not like Shia loved Hajime, she just happened to "see" hope in the midst of all her despair, breeding a mysterious sense of trust in Hajime.

Though he was completely merciless, he would not betray his promise.

Also, she could feel something "similar" in them by instinct, and Hajime cherished Yue who was the "same" as her.

Her clothes had become more ragged from the impact of the throw, to the point where she was in a very sorry state, especially as Shia was crying on the ground. He had indeed done too much… Feeling gloomy, Hajime pulled a reserve coat from “Treasure Warehouse” and put it on Shia’s head. He did not want to get any more involved than this.

Still, even with this, Shia was happy. She felt something on her head; when she looked, it was a coat which caused her to smile. She immediately put it on; it was the same white coat with a blue hue that Yue had, the one Yue made for Hajime to form a pair-look.

「R, really, you’re just not honest, Hajime-san～ It’s the same as Yue’s… Is, is it my feminine charm? That’s no good, you know～ I’m not so cheap, so please be more affectionate～」

Shia said that while gripping the hem of the coat, irritating Hajime yet again. He silently pulled out Donner, aimed it at Shia, and fired.

「Hakyun!」

He had fired a non-lethal bullet coated with a rubber-like demon hide. Still, because of the firepower, Shia jumped back and fell to the ground, rolling about in pain. 「My head～ My head～」 she screamed.

But, as expected of her endurance, she immediately stood up. The rabbit people quickly approached to treat her.

「Shia! Are you okay!」「Father!」

The one who called to her was a middle-aged rabbit-eared man with short, dark-blue hair. It was clear who he was. The spectacle had given the man a surreal feeling; immediately, Shia and her father began talking to the others about what happened. After confirming their safety, they all looked at Hajime.

「May I call you Hajime-dono? I am Cam, Shia's father and head of the Haulia Family. I can't thank you enough for helping us out of our predicament, even helping us to escape… I wish to express my gratitude as a father and the chief.」

The head of the Haulia Family who introduced himself as Cam bowed deeply. The rest of the Haulia Family bowed similarly behind him.

「Well, raise your head. When it's all done with, I want you to be our guide in the Sea of Trees. Don't forget, got it? Also, aren't you trusting us too easily? Especially since Demi-humans and Humans have a terrible relationship…」

Shia's existence aside, in this world, Demi-humans were looked down on; in fact, they were cornered here because of Humans. Even so, they bowed to Hajime who was clearly a Human and accepted his help. Even if it was their only means remaining, it was too simple. Hajime doubted them while concealing his disgust.

Cam smiled wryly.

「Shia trusts you, so we can trust you. Because we're family…」 Hajime was half-amazed and half-admiring them hearing such an

answer. For a group like this to leave their home for the sake of a single girl and to trust a human they had just met, their sense of caution must have been extremely thin, or perhaps they were simply too kind.

「E he he, it's fine, father. Hajime-san is merciless even with women, moves without concern for others, and is cruel enough to use people as a decoy, but he'll protect his promise. He's not some low life who would trample on others' hopes! He'll definitely protect us.」

「Ha ha ha, so that's it. He's a shy person, huh? Then I can believe him all the more.」

Hearing Shia and Cam talk to one another, the other clansmen also said, 「I see, a shy one, huh?」 as they looked at Hajime with warmth in their eyes.

Hajime pulled out Donner in irritation, but he was ambushed. 「… Mm, Hajime is shy (in bed).」

「Yue…」

Hajime did not go further because it would be troublesome if more demons gathered in the area, so he pressed everyone to move. With that, he took forty-two rabbit-eared people through the gorge.

Along the way, though they had been attacked by numerous

demons, none of their attacks succeeded. He did not let a single person get injured. Flashes of light flew through the air, crushing the demons' heads without mercy.

A crimson flash and gunfire. Many demon corpses were scattered about 【Raisen Gorge,】causing the rabbit people to look about in awe. As for the children, they had stars in their eyes seeing someone with such overwhelming power; to them, he was like a hero.

「Fu fu fu, Hajime -san. The children are watching, you know～ Why not wave to them?」

Shia immediately teased Hajime who was already in a bad mood because of those very innocent gazes.

With a vein on his head, Hajime silently fired his gun Dopan! Dopan! Dopan!

「A wa wa wa wa wa wa wa wa wa!?」

With rubber bullets aimed at her feet, Shia tried to evade, making it look like she was tap dancing. Shia's father, Cam, could only smile wryly while Yue looked at her in amazement.

「You two are already this close… I suppose Shia is already at that age. Father is a little lonely. But it should be fine if it's Hajime-dono…」

Though his daughter was being shot at, Cam was celebrating her departure with tears in the corner of his eyes. The other clansmen also looked at her with warm gazes as she screamed out, 「Help me～」

「Wait, all of you. Why is that your conclusion after seeing this?」
「… Unbelievable.」

The rabbit people lacked common sense, though it was quickly becoming something normal. They did not know if it applied only to the Haulia Family or to Rabbit Clan as a whole.

After walking for a while, the group finally arrived at the entrance to 【Raisen Gorge.】There was a finely built stair case that reached even to the distance of Hajime's "Far Sight." The stairs were built by cutting along the wall, and it made a turn every 50 meters. 【Hartsenna Sea of Trees】could be reached after walking for half a day after leaving 【Raisen Gorge.】

While Hajime tried looking to the distance, Shia started talking with unease in her voice.

「Are there any Empire soldiers there?」

「Hm? Can't say. There's the possibility they were annihilated already.」

「Th, that's, suppose there were soldiers around… Hajime-san…

what will you do?」「? What do you mean?」

Hajime tilted his head because he could not understand the

question. Every rabbit person's ears twitched hearing her question.

「Unlike demons, the enemies are soldiers… Humans. They're the same as Hajime-san… are you sure you can fight them?」

「You shameless rabbit, didn't you already see the future?」「Yes, I saw you confronting them…」

「Then… what's the problem?」

「I want to confirm it. To protect us, you'll be confronting the Empire's soldiers and Humans. Are you really okay, fighting against them…」

Hearing her question, the surrounding rabbit people nervously looked at Hajime. The children could not understand what was happening, but they could tell by the atmosphere that something was going on and looked between Hajime and their family.

However, despite this serious atmosphere, Hajime casually responded.

「What's wrong with that?」「Eh?」

Hajime ignored Shia's confusion and continued.

「Like I said, there's no problem fighting Humans.」「Th, that's, aren't you from the same race…?」

「Wasn't your clan chased out by other demi-humans?」「That's, well, even if you put it like that…」

「Well, you're wrong from the start.」「Start?」

Shia tilted her head in confusion and looked at the surrounding rabbit people, also confused.

「Listen, I'm employing your clan to be my guide. I'd be troubled if you died here, so I'll protect them. It's not like I'm sympathizing with you, and it's not like I have some kind of kindness. Remember, I won't protect you forever, or did you forget?」

「Uu, yes… I remember…」

「I'll protect you until my business in the Sea of Trees is over. Everything is for my own benefit. It doesn't matter whether it's Demon or Human, if they hinder my path, they are enemies that need to be killed. It's as simple as that.」

「I, I see…」

Shia consented with a bitter smile to hear an answer so in line with his personality. Even if her "Premonition" saw Hajime confronting the Empire, the future was not absolute, so she was not sure if it would come true or not. There were other futures with a higher possibility that she had seen, and one was a future where they became slaves of the Empire living a life more painful than death. Because she thought it was her fault, even if others did not, she worked with all her might to ensure their future.

「Ha ha ha, it's good to know that. Please leave it to us to guide you through the Sea of Trees.」

Cam laughed cheerfully. Rather than a stupid sense of justice, if things were give and take, it was more reassuring. His face said it all.

They approached the stairs. Hajime had gone ahead of them in caution. To escape from the soldiers, the rabbit people had not eaten anything; still, their steps were light. The rumor of Demi-humans, despite being unable to use magic, having a high physical strength was true.

Finally, they escaped from 【Raisen Gorge.】 What they saw over the cliff was…

「Hey, seriously, there are survivors. I didn't want to stay here just because of the commander's orders～ If it was like this, though, I can bring back a good souvenir.」

There were approximately thirty soldiers from the Empire. Behind them were numerous wagons and carriages as well as signs of a camp being made. All the soldiers were dressed in uniform and bore a sword or spear with a shield. They looked in surprise at Hajime's group.

However, that only lasted a second. They immediately grew happy seeing the rabbit people.

「Leader! The white-haired rabbit's there, too! Isn't she the one the commander wanted?」

「Oh, lucky. It's fine to kill the older ones, but make sure you keep her alive.」

「Leader~ There are some women in there, can we taste them a bit? We've been here for 3 days after all. Please, let it go~」

「Fine, just don't take all of them. Two or three is fine.」

「Hyahoo~ As expected of our leader! You really do understand us!」

For the soldiers, the Rabbit Clan was only easy prey for them to catch; they approached while looking at the women. Seeing this, the rabbit people could only tremble in fright.

The leader, who was also grinning, finally noticed Hajime and Yue.
「Ahh? Who are you ? You're… not a rabbit.」

Hajime, who thought it impossible to simply pass through, responded frankly.

「Right, I'm human.」

「Haa~? Why is a human with the Rabbit Clan? You even came from the Gorge. Ahh, are you a slave merchant? Did you get information somewhere? That's some great business spirit you have. Well, sorry, but you'll have to hand them over to the Empire now.」

The leader made an assumption, though it was natural seeing the situation. He gave an order to Hajime.

Of course, there was no need for Hajime to listen. 「I refuse.」

「… What did you just say?」

「Didn't you hear? I said 『I refuse.』 They're mine now. I won't give you even one. I recommend you give up and go back to the Empire right now.」

The leader thought he had mistaken what he heard, but he was given an order in return.

「… Boy, mind your words. Is there something wrong with your head to not know who we are?」

「I already know. If you can't even understand that much, then something must definitely be wrong with your head.」

Hearing this, all other soldiers glared at Hajime, creating a tense atmosphere.

The leader finally noticed Yue behind Hajime. Perhaps due to the gap, he was enchanted by her beauty for a moment. Seeing her tightly hold Hajime's clothes, a smile appeared on his face.

「Ahh～ I see, I get it～ You're just a shitty naive boy. Let me teach you how severe this world can be. Ku ku ku, that little girl over there is quite beautiful. How about I violate her in front of you when I've chopped off your limbs? I'm sure she'd make a great slave, too.」

Hajime's eyebrow twitched, and it was clear Yue was disgusted despite her expressionless face. Because she could not permit the man in her presence, Yue held her right hand.

But Hajime stopped her. Yue, who was doubtful of his action, looked up at him.

「So you're my enemy?」

「Hah!? Do you still not understand the situation? Bastard, shouldn't you be on the ground begging for forgiven—」

But before the man could finish his threat, an explosion screamed.

The man was irritated by Hajime who was clearly not frightened of him and shouted, but his head was forcibly removed forever. He fell back like a doll with its strings cut.

The soldiers did not understand what happened as they looked at the miserable remains of their leader in blank surprise.

Dopan!

Another gunshot was heard. At the same time, six soldiers were

felled. He had fired six bullets, but he was fast enough that only a single explosion could be heard.

Naturally, after seeing their leader and comrades' heads being shot through, the soldiers began to panic, turning their weapons to Hajime. They did not know how he did it, but they understood he was the cause. Personality aside, they had made a precise judgment. As expected of the Empire soldiers, their ability was real.

「Kill him!」

「Start chanting!」

The soldiers immediately moved forward as the rear guard began chanting; however, something immediately rolled over their feet. It was a black, cylindrical object. They looked at it without interrupting their chant, only to turn into corpses in the next moment.

A terrifying sound rang beneath them as metal scattered about, bringing death to them.

The object in question was a "Grenade," chock full of combustion powder. Furthermore, it was a "Frag Grenade" which he had transmuted with metal fragments inside. Compared to the source from Earth, it was far more powerful.

With only a single attack, ten soldiers died immediately, their hands and feet blown off, their organs scattered. Seven others could be heard groaning in pain.

Feeling the explosion behind them, seven of the vanguard stopped

their charge. Wondering what happened, most looked back and crumbled as they were shot through the head. Blood rained over the ground. One still remained alive, though he lost all strength and remained rooted to the spot. In a single moment, his companions were annihilated. Some were even amongst the higher ranks, complaining about receiving orders to sit in wait. His gaze wandered about, though he felt as if he were in a nightmare inside.

An aloof voice, the cause of the tragedy, reached his ear.

「Yep, as expected. If it's a fight against a person, there's no need to use "Lightning Clad." The usual bullet is enough. Man, the Combustion Stone is really convenient.」

The soldier turned to Hajime in fright. Hajime was tapping Donner against his shoulder as he slowly approached the soldier. He brought death. With his black coat and gun, he looked like the God of Death to the Soldier.

「Hiii! D, don't get any closer! N, no, I don't want to die! S, someone! Help me!」

The soldier pleaded for his life, his face distorted in fear as he wet

himself. Hajime looked at him coldly and slowly opened fire.
「Hii!」

The soldier felt no impact. Hajime did not shoot the man in front of him but the soldiers injured by the grenade. When he realized it, he looked about timidly, only to see the disastrous scene.

The gun muzzle was finally aimed at the stiffened soldier. Again, his body shook as he pleaded for his life with an unbecoming expression.

「P, please! Please don't kill me! I, I'll do anything! Please!」

「Is that so? Then tell me what happened to the rest of the rabbit people. There should be plenty of them… have they been transported to the Empire?」

It normally took time for hundreds of people along with the rabbit people to move around, so it would be fine to help them if they were nearby. If they had arrived at the Empire already, though, he would not purposely go.

「… W, will you let me live if I tell you?」

「Are you really in the position to ask me that? Well, it's not like I need the information. Should I kill you now?」

「P, please wait! I'll tell you! I'll tell you! They're probably being transported since we've reached our quota…」

The "quota" he referred to meant they had obtained enough, including those who would not sell, such as the elderly, who would be killed. Hearing that, the rabbit people had bitter expressions. Hajime took a look at their expression and immediately glanced back at the soldier. His killing intent was clear to see.

「Wait! Please wait! I'll tell you anything! Whether it's about the

Empire or not! Please!」

Having noticed Hajime's killing intent, the soldier desperately pleaded for his life. In response…

A single bullet.

All the rabbit people held their breath. Seeing Hajime's completely heartless behavior, they looked fearful.

Shia, feeling the same way, timidly spoke up. 「W, wasn't it okay to overlook him…」

Haa? Hajime glanced at her in amazement. 「Uuu.」 The man was one who had killed her family members and tried to enslave them. It seemed the rabbit people could forgive them. When Hajime tried to say something, Yue immediately spoke up.

「… The result was set the moment they drew their weapon. Strong or not, they'll be an inconvenience to overlook.」

「Th, that's…」

「… How can you even look at Hajime like that when he protected

you…」 「…」

Yue was quietly angry. Though the two were protecting all of them, she would not forgive those who harbored negative feelings toward Hajime. Even if it was a natural reaction, the rabbit people felt guilty.

「Right, Hajime- dono. I apologize. It is not as if we are blaming you. It's just, for us, we have never seen something like this…

right, we were simply surprised.」「I'm sorry, Hajime-san.」

With Shia and Cam apologizing, Hajime just waved his hand and told them not to worry.

Hajime went to the horse and carriage and beckoned to the Haulia Family. Because it would take half a day to reach the Sea of Trees on foot, he decided to take advantage of the carriage and use a special horse.

Hajime took Stiefe out of "Treasure Warehouse" and connected it to the wagon. Some rode horses directly while the rest were carried in the carriage.

Yue dropped the corpses of the tragic soldiers into the ravine using Wind Magic. By the time she finished, only a pool of blood remained.

He was heading to one of the seven Great Labyrinths in the country of Demi-humans. The country of【Felbergan】was in control of【Hartsenna Sea of Trees】Since the trees were growing larger little by little, they were soon approaching.

On Stiefe, Yue was nestled within Hajime's arms while Shia had gotten on behind Hajime. At first, Shia was going to get on a horse

alone, but she insisted on being on Stiefe as well. No matter how much Yue beat her, she got up like a zombie and clung to them. In the end, Yue's patience was exhausted.

Shia wanted to talk to the "same kind of people" she had met for the first time. Naturally, the two were displeased with how much she clung to them. To make Shia's seat on Stiefe behind Hajime… based on the circumstances, Yue was prepared to tie her by her hands and feet and drag her behind.

Regardless, Hajime was placed between the cheerful Shia and Yue who was in a poor mood, looking into the distance as they drove along.

While Hajime was like this, he heard Yue's voice.

「… Hajime, why did you fight by yourself?」「Hm?」

She was referring to his fight with the Empire's soldiers. At that time, he had stopped her from using magic and fought them alone. Though there would be little difference since Yue, too, would "instakill" the soldiers, she thought Hajime was a little too eager to fight alone, making her anxious.

「Hm～ Well, I just wanted to confirm things…」「… Confirm?」

Yue asked him with a doubtful face. Shia was also intrigued and looked over his shoulder.

「Ah, that's…」

Hajime explained things to the two of them.

Hajime stopped her because he wanted to fight the Empire's soldiers as an "experiment." Though it looked like he had head-shot all of them, he aimed for their armor. He thought using his rail gun was overkill against a human, and it would be dangerous to use in town because of its penetrating power. He would have no trouble destroying random thugs, but the rail gun would also go through buildings and kill people inside. He would simply be a lowlife if he fought like that.

For Hajime, he did not want to indiscriminately kill unrelated people. It was necessary for him to measure the proper amount of power. After looking at the results of his experiment, he was able to fine-tune his output.

Another reason was to confirm whether or not he would have hesitation in killing humans. Though he had changed, he did not yet have experience killing humans. He wanted to see how he would react.

The result was that "he felt nothing." As expected, he could kill enemies without mercy.

「Well, even though it was my first murder, I feel a bit sentimental knowing I didn't really feel anything about it…」

「… I see… Are you okay?」

「Yeah, no problem. As I am now, I'm just glad I'll be able to fight

properly.」

Having heard Hajime's words, Shia was surprised to see it was his first time killing a human. At the same time, she admired Yue who noticed even this slight change (Hajime specific.) Once again, she felt lonely since she knew very little about them.

「Um, um! Can I hear more about you two, Hajime-san, Yue-san?」

「Hm? Aren't we talking now?」

「Ahh, I didn't mean talking about your skills or anything, I meant why you were in the Abyss? What are your objectives? What have you been doing until now? I want to know more about you two.」

「… After you've heard it, what then?」

「Even if you ask me, I just want to know… Because of my circumstances, I've brought a lot of trouble to my family. I've hated it, even since I was a child … no one blamed me, so it's not like I hate myself… but I still feel like I'm a strange existence in this world… I was happy to meet the two of you, to find similar existences, to know I'm not alone… though it's selfish of me, I, I want to be your companion… if you could tell me more about yourselves… whatever you can…」

Shia was embarrassed by her own words, her voice becoming smaller as she hid behind Hajime's back. When they thought back to when they first met, the recalled how happy she was.

At that time, Yue had complex emotions, and until this moment, only demons had attacked the Haulia Family; it was difficult to talk about these things in the Gorge as well. Shia must have been interested for a long time now.

Certainly, in this world, those with a constitution similar to a demon's would not be easily received. Her feelings were inevitable. With that said, Hajime and Yue were still not sure how to handle Shia.

But… until they arrived at the Sea of Trees, she asked numerous questions. Since neither Hajime nor Yue had a particular reason to hide anything, they spoke about their pasts. As a result…

「Uee, gusu… derrible, doo derrible~ Hajime-san, Yue-san, zo boor~ C, compared do you dwo, I was blessed… Uu~ I had everything~」

She cried, occasionally saying 「I was too naive,」 or 「I won't complain anymore!」 Naturally, she wiped her face with Hajime's overcoat. She had thought her circumstances bad, but, compared to Hajime and Yue, she felt miserable for thinking that way.

After crying for a while, Shia suddenly clasped her fist with a resolute expression.

「Hajime -san! Yue-san! I've decided! I'll join you in your journey! From now on, Shia Haulia will promise beneath the sunlight to help you two! No need to be reserved. The three of us are comrades! Let's overcome hardship together!」

Hearing this sudden declaration, Hajime and Yue could only give her a cold look.

「What did the weak rabbit who needed to be protected just say? You're a hindrance.」

「… Suddenly changing from "wanting to be a comrade" into a "comrade," shameless rabbit.」

「Wh, why are you giving me those cold looks! Aren't you moved… now that I think about it, please properly call me by my name!」

Shia was shaken because her eagerness was met with a cold gaze. Then she was dealt an additional blow.

「… You, don't you just want a travel companion?」

「!?」

Shia was shocked by his words.

「Once your family is safe, you were going to leave them, right? Then you came into this situation where the "same" type of people showed up, so you want to come with us? Well, of course, having an unusual hair color for a rabbit person would make it hard to travel alone.」

「… Umm, even if you say that… I just wanted to…」

Perhaps because he hit the bull's eye, Shia stuttered. The truth was, she was determined to leave her family once their safety was

ensured. As long as she was there, her family would be in danger. Even now, many were still missing. They could very well be destroyed the next time they were attacked. Shia was unable to endure it.

Of course, her family would reject this, and leaving would make it seem like she betrayed them. Even with that, she had made her decision.

At worst, she would go alone, but that would worry her family even more. On the other hand, if she said she would leave to repay Hajime and Yue, then it would be easier to convince them to let her leave. She was clearly “desperate.”

Of course, it was true Shia was interested in the two. As Hajime had said, Shia found people “similar” to her, so she felt a strong sense of camaraderie with them. Even when thinking about the circumstances of her family, it was “fate” to have met the two.

「Well, it’s not like I can blame you for thinking that way. Even so, don’t expect anything. Our objective is the seven Great Labyrinths. They will be infested with demons similar to those in the Abyss. You’ll be killed instantly, and that will be the end

of that. I won’t let you come with us.」「…」

Hajime’s relentless words made Shia fall silent. Hajime and Yue were unconcerned and continued on. From then on, Shia sat quietly on Stiefe with an expression that was difficult to read.

After several hours, they finally arrived at the border of

【Hartsenna Sea of Trees.】From the outside, they could only see a dense forest, but it soon became covered in fog the moment they stepped inside.

「Now then, Hajime- dono, Yue-dono. Please, never part from us here. Though it is possible for you to travel on your own, it will be a problem to get lost here. Also, our destination is in the deepest parts, beneath the Great Tree.」

「Right, though I've only heard about it, I think it will have a path leading to the true Labyrinth.」

Cam confirmed Hajime's destination within the Sea of Trees. What Cam called the Great Tree was a massive tree which existed

within the depths of 【Hartsenna Sea of Trees,】and it was known by Demi-humans as "The Great Tree, Wa Alt." It was a sacred place no one dared to approach. He had heard this from Cam after they escaped from the canyon.

At first, Hajime thought 【Hartsenna Sea of Trees】was one large Labyrinth, but then he realized it would be impossible for demi-humans to live there if demons as strong as those in the Abyss wandered about. Even for 【Orcus Great Labyrinth,】 they could only guess where the true entrance was. He became suspicious when he heard about "The Great Tree" from Cam.

Cam nodded in response and signaled the other clansmen to make

formation with Hajime and Yue in the center.

「Hajime- dono, if possible, please erase your presence, The Great Tree is a sacred place, so it's forbidden to approach it. There is the possibility we will encounter someone from Felbergan as well. We are wanted, so it would be troublesome if they found us.」

「Got it, I'll do that. Yue and I can do that to some degree.」
Hajime used his skill "Presence Interception" while Yue thinned

her own presence using methods she developed during their time in the Abyss.

「!? This is… Hajime-dono, if possible, could you adjust it to the same level as Yue-dono?」

「Hm? Something like this…? 」

「Yes, that's enough. If you hide it too much, we might lose sight of you. Ah, as expected of you!」

Though the Rabbit Clan had low specs, they excelled in stealth and searching operations using sound. The technique Yue developed to hide her presence were excellent on the surface, at the level of an expert.

However, Hajime's "Presence Interception" was more powerful. If it was a normal place, they would be able to find him, but, inside the Sea of Trees, even with their specialty, they would have difficulty.

Having their strongest ability surpassed by a human, Cam could only smile bitterly. Beside him, Yue proudly puffed up her chest. Shia had a complex expression, most likely due to the difference in ability he had just shown.

「Shall we go?」

The group advanced per Cam's urging. Cam and Shia headed into the Sea of Trees with depressed emotions.

After a while, they were unable to see the road. A thick fog surrounded them, cutting off their sight; however, Cam showed no hesitation in his steps. He completely understood the location and the direction they needed to travel. It was not known why Demi-humans alone were able to understand their location but, even so, they were able to move about accurately through the Sea of Trees.

As they advanced, Cam suddenly stopped and looked around their surroundings. There were demons present. Naturally, Hajime and Yue could also feel them. Apparently, they were surrounded.

Hajime suddenly and quickly waved his left hand horizontally. There were faint firing sounds. Then,

Dosa, Dosa, Dosa

「「「Kiiii!?」」」

Three screams and the sound of impacts. The fog divided quickly, and three monkeys 60 centimeters tall with four arms began dancing about.

Yue held up her hand and aimed at one of them, whispering quietly.

「— “Wind Blade.”」

A high speed sword of wind flew out as she called the name of the magic, dividing a monkey vertically without resistance. The monkey fell to the ground without screaming.

The other two moved separately. One approached a child while the other aimed its four arms equipped with sharp claws at Shia. Shia and the child instinctively froze up. Meanwhile, the nearby adults began yelling… but that was a baseless worry.

Hajime moved his left arm again, Pashu! Countless needles stuck in the monkey attacking Shia and the child.

Hajime had used a weapon built into his artificial left arm, a “Needle Gun.”

He had taken the idea from the scorpion he fought before. He was able to fire off needles built into his arm. With the aid of “Lightning Clad,” though not to the level of Donner & Schlag, it still had moderate power.

Though its range was only about 10 meters, it excelled in its silent operation and was convenient because he had poisonous needles as well. In the Sea of Trees, because he did not want to stand out, he

avoided using Donner & Schlag.

「Th, thank you, Hajime-san.」「Onii-chan, thanks!」

Shia and the child (a boy) thanked him. Hajime gestured, telling them not to worry about it. The boy looked up at him with sparkling eyes while Shia's shoulders drooped in her inability to do anything but freeze up.

Cam simply smiled bitterly at her. After being urged on by Hajime, they continued on their journey.

Even though more demons came to attack them, Hajime and Yue quietly dealt with the problem. The demons of the Sea of Trees, which were often thought of as troublesome, were not a problem for the two.

However, after several hours, countless presences, incomparable to before, were felt. The group stopped its advance. The killing intent and teamwork displayed here was beyond what the demons were capable of.

Cam and his clan restlessly looked about, their rabbit ears jumping about as they searched the surroundings. A worried, loose expression appeared on their face. As for Shia, she was pale. Hajime and Yue noticed the other party's identity and felt something troublesome was about to occur. The other party appeared…

「You… Why are you together with humans! What clan are you from!」

What appeared before them were muscular demi-humans with tiger ears and tails.

Human and Demi-human, walking side-by-side in the Sea of Trees. Seeing this impossible spectacle, the tigermen looked at Cam and his family as if they were traitors, They readied their double-edged swords while taking a stance. Dozens of demi-humans

surrounded them, emitting killing intent. 「W, we're…」

Cam, who was drenched in a cold sweat, tried to find an excuse; meanwhile, the same tigerman caught glimpse of Shia, his eyes wide open.

「That's… the gray-haired rabbit girl? Bastards… So you're the Haulia Family… A disgrace to Demi-humans! You've deceived us for years and raised that child, and now you've even brought humans here! Treason! No excuses! Everyone here will be executed! Everyone, gah!?」

Dopan!!

When the tigerman said there would be no negotiation and began commanding an attack, Hajime's arm moved and a gunshot was heard as something grazed the tigerman's cheek; trees could be seen

gouged out deeper into the forest.

The man froze, unable to understand what happened. If his ears were located on the side like a Human's, it would surely have been blown away. Everyone was stunned by the explosive sound and the attack which was too fast for them to react to.

Hajime's voice was heard accompanied by an extraordinary pressure. This was the result of his unique magic, "Overpower," which directly applied physical pressure to the enemy.

「I can fire that very attack ten times in succession. I know how many of you are surrounding us, and you're all within my range.」

「Wh, wha… no incantation…」

Without chanting, he had fired an invisible attack, and he also knew the location of all his comrades, making the tigerman stutter. To prove that, Hajime pulled out Schlag and aimed in a specific direction. Located there were the man's subordinates. Signs of unrest were felt from within the fog.

「No mercy to those in my path. Until they have fulfilled their promise, their lives are under my protection… Don't even think you'll lay a hand on a single one of them.」

Alongside the pressure, Hajime emitted killing intent. The Tiger Clan, known for their thick-headed nature and aggressive personalities, was drenched in a cold sweat. They panicked and started screaming, though one tried his best to remain calm.

(What a joke! How, how is this a Human! He's a monster!) To the lone demi-human working hard not to lose to his fear,

Hajime continued while pulling out Donner.

「If you retreat now, I won't give chase. If you're not an enemy, I have no reason to kill you. Choose. Will you be my enemy and be pointlessly annihilated, or will you quietly go home?」

The tigerman was convinced the moment he gave the order to attack. The flash he saw a moment ago would leave no chance for survival.

The man was the captain of the 2nd Guard of Felbergan. His duty was to patrol between Felbergan and the surrounding villages; it was his pride, his resolution to protect his brethren from intruders and demons. It was not such an easy thing for him to simply retreat.

「… Before that, I wish to know one thing.」

The man desperately asked Hajime with a hoarse voice. Hajime urged him further with his eyes.

「… What's your purpose?」

It was a straightforward question; however, depending on the answer, he would be able to settle his resolution to fight, even if it meant risking his life. It was impossible for the tigermen to let anyone go if their aim was to hurt other demi-humans, so he bravely stared at Hajime with unyielding eyes.

「The depths of the Sea of Trees. I want to go beneath the Great

Tree.」

「Beneath the Great Tree…? For what purpose?」

He originally thought their goal was to enslave demi-humans, but hearing their destination was the sacred “Great Tree,” he could only look confused. “The Great Tree,” for Demi-humans, was only one of many places within the Sea of Trees.

「The entrance to the True Great Labyrinth may be there. We are traveling to conquer the Seven Great Labyrinths. That’s why we employed the Haulia as our guide.」

「The True Great Labyrinth? What are you trying to say? This Sea of Trees is one of the seven Great Labyrinths. This Labyrinth is one where only Demi-humans can advance without getting lost.」

「Well that’s certainly odd.」「What is?」

The tigerman dubiously asked Hajime why he made that declaration.

「For a Great Labyrinth, the demons here are too weak.」
「Weak?」

「Right. All the demons in a Great Labyrinth are supposed to be monstrously strong. At the very least, they should be around the level of those in the Abyss in 【Orcus Great Labyrinth.】Also…」

「What is it?」

「A Great Labyrinth is a trial left behind by the “Liberators.” For Demi-humans to easily enter the depths, was it? That isn’t a trial. That’s why it’s odd for the Sea of Trees itself to be called

a Great Labyrinth.」「…」

The tigerman was unable to hide his confusion. He was unable to understand what Hajime meant. He had said the demons in the Sea of Trees were weak, he mentioned the Abyss of

【Orcus Great Labyrinth,】as well as a trial… they were all unknown to him.

If it were the usual, he would dismiss it as nonsense. However, in this place, what Hajime said was appropriate. He was able to overwhelm everything here, so there was no need for him to make up an excuse.

In addition, his words themselves were strangely convincing. If his objective truly was the Great Tree and not the Demi-humans or Felbergan, then, rather than pointlessly throwing his subordinates’ lives away, it was best to assist him in meeting his objective and then have him leave.

The tigerman made that decision; however, he could not just leave Hajime to wander about freely. For this reason, he made a proposal.

「… If you aren't planning on harming my country or my brethren, then I don't care if you go to the Great Tree. There's no meaning in throwing our lives away.」

Having heard his words, the surrounding demi-humans began stirring. He was overlooking a human intruder in the Sea of Trees.

「However, I must also ask the captain of the 1st Guard. I also need to report to my country. The elders may know something of your story. If that place truly exists, I hope you can remain with us until that is known.」

While covered in sweat, the man stared with a strong will. Hajime gave it some thought.

It was likely his limit. Intruders to the Sea of Trees were killed without fail. Even now, they likely wanted to punish everyone here; however, his subordinates lives would be lost for sure. To avoid this, and for the sake of not letting a potential threat like Hajime on the loose, he made that proposal.

Hajime was impressed by his rational judgment under this situation. After comparing the merits between advancing after annihilating the group and having permission and possibly losing sight around Felbergan… he chose the latter.

If the Great Tree was not the entrance to the Great Labyrinth, he would need to continue searching. In doing so, it would be more

convenient to have permission. Of course, there was the risk of them becoming hostile, but that was only when there was no other option remaining. It was not a humane judgment on his part, the other option was simply too troublesome.

「… I accept. Please report everything without distorting anything we have said.」

「Of course. Zam! You heard, right? Report this to the Elders!」
「Yes, sir!」

With the tigerman's word, one person disappeared. After confirming this, Hajime holstered Donner & Schlag and released "Overpower."

The atmosphere relaxed instantly. The tigermen looked at Hajime who readily released the pressure. "Now!" there seemed to be some demi- humans who remained in attack mode. Hajime noticed the meaning of their gaze and smiled fearlessly.

「Your attack or me pulling out my weapon and firing to see which is faster… you want to try it?」

「… No. But please don't make any unnecessary movements. We might move on reflex.」

「Got it.」

Though surrounded, they had finally reached a point where they

might be more safe, causing the Haulia Family to sigh in relief. However, Hajime turned a stern gaze like a common thug at them.

For a while, the oppressive atmosphere filled the surroundings. However, perhaps tired of it, Yue began taking care of Hajime. Shia, seeing this harmony, muttered, 「Me too～!」Hajime could only force a smile as the atmosphere softened. Within enemy territory, they began to flirt (from the view of the demi-humans); Hajime could feel their amazement.

After an hour, Shia was found to be in a joint lock administered by Yue and saying 「Give! I give～!」while desperately tapping her hand to the ground. The surrounding demi-humans watched in both amazement and warmth. They then felt some presences approach them.

The tension built up quickly. Shia, however, only felt joint pains. From the fog, several demi-humans appeared. There was an

elderly gentleman in the center who attracted the most attention. He had beautiful flowing blonde hair and blue eyes with deep knowledge in them. His body was thin, as if he would blow away with the wind. There were some wrinkles on his dignified face, but this only accentuated his beauty. Above

A so-called Elf

all, he had long ears. He was from the Forest Clan.

Hajime instantly guessed he was one of the “elders.” His guess was right on the money.

「Hmm, so you are the human? What is your name?」「Hajime, Nagumo Hajime. You?」

Hearing Hajime's manner of speech, the surrounding demi-humans began saying, 「How dare you speak to the elder like that!」Their resentment was clear to see. The man from the Forest Clan calmed them with a wave of his hand.

「I am Alfrick Hypist. I am one of the Elders of Felbergan. Now then, I have heard your request, but… before that, I have something to ask. Where did you find out about the "Liberators?"」

「Hm? From the Abyss in【Orcus Great Labyrinth.】I heard about them from one of the Liberators when I was in Oscar Orcus's hideout.」

Without any reason to hide anything, Hajime responded to Alfrick's question as he seemed interested in the Liberators.

Alfrick was astonished, though he did not show it on his face. The term Liberator and Oscar Orcus's name was known only to a few of the elders.

「Hm, the Abyss, is it… I have not heard that term for a long time… Can you prove it?」

Aflric asked Hajime this question because there was the possibility the information was leaked out by the higher ups in Demi-human society. Hajime had a difficult expression. Even though he was told to prove it, he could only show his strength. Yue tilted her head and gave Hajime a suggestion.

「… Hajime, his relic and the magic cores?」「Ahh! That's right, if it's that…」

He clasped his hand and took out some high quality magic cores unobtainable by demons from the surface. He passed it to Alfrick.

「Th, this is… A magic core of such purity, I have never seen one…」

A tigerman called out in astonishment while Alfrick's eyebrow twitched.

「This too. It was a ring worn by Orcus…」

As he said this, he showed Alfrick Orcus's ring. Alfrick's eyes opened wide in astonishment upon seeing the symbol carved there. He began to breathe slowly to control his emotions.

「Indeed… You have certainly reached Oscar Orcus's lair. Though there are other things I wish to ask… very well. For now, please come with me to Felbergan. Ah, of course, the Haulia as well.」

Having heard Alfrick's words, it was not just the surrounding demi-humans but Cam and the Haulia family that were surprised. Led by the tigermen, many wanted to protest furiously. That much was natural, since humans had been invited to Felbergan.

「You will treat them as guests. They are qualified for that. Also, this is a rule that has been decided by one amongst the Elders.」

Alfrick calmed the surroundings with a stern gaze; however, it was Hajime who protested next.

「Wait, why the hell are you deciding my schedule? I'm going to the Great Tree. Also, I have no interest in Felbergan. If you have no other questions, then just let me go.」

「Well, that would be impossible.」「What was that?」

So you're going to interfere after all, Hajime thought, but he was confused by Alfrick's expression.

「The fog around the Great Tree is especially thick, even Demi-humans get lost. There are cycles when the fog thins out, however. That is why you should not go there at this time. The next time you can go will be in 10 days… this is supposed to be known by all demi-humans, but…」

Alfrick looked at Hajime as if saying, 「What were you thinking, going there at a time like this?」Then he looked at Cam and the

other Rabbit people. Hajime, hearing this, finally

understood what was going on. He stared at Cam…

「Ah.」

He had only just recalled. A vein appeared on Hajime's forehead.
「Cam? 」

「Ah, well, what can I say… A lot has happened, so I forgot… I've only been there once when I was a child, so I was not quite aware of the cycles…」

Cam desperately looked for an excuse and became flustered. Unable to take this, he looked away from Hajime and Yue and looked at the others.

「Shia! Everyone! Why didn't you mention this! You knew about the cycles as well, right!?」

「F, father, you're misplacing your anger! I thought the cycle would be near since you were so confident… anyway, it's all your fault~!」

「That's right. We also thought it was odd, but since you were so confident, we thought we may have been wrong…」

「Chief, it's because you got excited about something random…」
Cam was blamed by Shia and the others, everyone looking away

in the meanwhile.

「Y, you! Is that how a family is! Th, that's! It's all joint responsibility! Hajime-dono, not just me, if you must punish someone, punish us all!」

「Ah, dirty! Father is dirty~! It's scary to be punished alone, so you're just trying to drag everyone in!」

「Chief, don't involve us!」

「Idiot! You've seen how Hajime-dono is! I don't want to be punished alone!」

「You! How can you call yourself the Chief!」

The Rabbit Clan, known for their great affection, were noisily trying to push responsibility on one another. Exactly where did their affection go… as expected of Shia's family. They were all shameless rabbits.

Hajime muttered a single word.

「… Yue.」 「Mm.」

Having heard Hajime, Yue took a step forward and held out her right hand. The Haulia Family had cramped cheeks.

「W, wait, Yue-san! If you want to do that, just aim it at father!」
「Ha ha ha, we'll always be together!」

「To hell with together!」

「Yue-dono, please hit only the Chief!」

「It's not my fault, it's not my fault! The Chief is the one to blame!」

While the Haulia Family was in chaos, Yue quietly muttered.
「“Storm Emperor.”」

— Ahhh!!!

The rabbit-eared people flew into the sky.

Their screams echoed throughout the Sea of Trees. Even though their brethren were attacked, Alfrick and the surrounding demi-humans showed no sign of anger at all. Rather, they looked to the sky in amazement. It seemed the Haulia Family’s shamelessness was widely known.

Heaps of corpses and bullets lay on the ground. The Haulia Family was twitching pitifully. Hajime had fired rubber coated bullets at them, and while ignoring the tears in their eyes, he urged them forward.

Though he had an indescribable expression, Alfrick sent a signal to the tigerman, Gil, with a glance. Gil sighed as if tired and guided everyone through the dense fog.

Hajime and Yue, as well as the Haulia Family, were surrounded by the demi-humans. Considering they had yet to reach Felbergan after an hour, Hajime had some admiration for the tigerman named Zam from before who was likely as fast as a horse.

After some time, they arrived at a place where the fog cleared up.

Though not all fog disappeared, there was a road which

resembled a tunnel within the fog. Looking at it more closely, fist-sized crystals were buried at the side of the road, emitting a blue light. They had the ability to ward away the fog.

Alfrick, noticing Hajime focusing on the blue crystals began explaining things.

「Those are Feldrain Crystals. Though we do not know the reason, fog and demons do not approach them. They also surround Felbergan and the villages nearby. Well, when it comes to demons, it only "relatively" wards them away.」

「I see. Well, it's depressing being in the fog all the time. At the very least, I would want it gone in the place I was living.」

There would not be any fog inside the towns. That was good news, since they would have to wait for 10 days inside the Sea of Trees. Yue felt the fog was depressing and was happy hearing their conversation.

Meanwhile, they reached a huge gate. It was made of thick trees twining together to form an arch. A pair of wooden doors, 10 meters wide and 30 meters high, was set into the trees. They had a magnificence suitable to the Demi-human "country."

Gil gave a signal to the demi-humans who were gate keepers and

had the gate open slightly, emitting a heavy sound. From above, piercing gazes were directed at Hajime and the others. They could not hide their agitation toward humans entering their city. If only Gil was there and not Alfrick, they would have trouble entering. Perhaps the elder came out himself knowing this would happen.

After passing through the gate, they entered a different world. There were large trees, tens of meters in diameter, and inside

those trees were dwellings made by hollowing out the trunk. Many lamps shined through the windows. Dozens of people could be seen walking along the corridors made of thick intertwining branches. On the large vines, there were elevator-like objects using a pulley system as well as a huge wooden waterway hanging between trees. The trees themselves must have been twenty stories high.

Hajime and Yue were mesmerized by the beautiful cityscape. They did not notice that they had stopped walking. Alfrick coughed to bring their attention to him.

「Fu fu, it seems you've taken a liking to our home, Felbergan.」
Alfrick seemed happy. The surrounding demi-humans, including the Haulia Family, had a proud look on their faces as well.

Hajime honestly praised the city.

「Yeah, it's my first time seeing such a beautiful city. The atmosphere is great. It truly is a town which harmonizes with nature.」

「Mm… Beautiful.」

Hearing such straightforward praise, many of the demi-humans were surprised; however, they were all happy to some extent. They tried to avert their face and grunt, but their animal ears and tails were all vigorously moving.

The residents of Felbergan looked at Hajime and his group in curiosity. There were many eyes filled with hatred, others with confusion; still, they continued to follow Alfrick.

「… I see. A trial to earn magic from the Age of Gods, and a game the gods are playing…」

Hajime and Yue were talking to Alfrick. They spoke of the "Liberators" and magic from the Age of the Gods which Hajime heard about from Oscar Orcus. He also spoke of how he was from a different world and was trying to complete the Seven Great Labyrinths so he could search for a magic from the Age of the Gods which might return him to his world.

Having heard this, there was no change in Alfrick's expression. Hajime thought it was strange and asked. 「Even now, this world doesn't treat demi-humans well」 was the response he received. Apparently, whether the gods had gone mad or not, treatment of Demi-humans would not change in the least. They lived in a place not under the influence of the Saint Church, nor did they have a particular faith. They simply appreciated the bounty nature provided them.

After Hajime finished his story, Alfrick spoke about the laws of the elders of Felbergan.

It was an oral tradition that if someone who bore the crest of the Seven Great Labyrinths appeared without having hostility toward them, they would be guided to their destination.

The creator of the Great Labyrinth, 【Hartsenna Sea of Trees,】 was Luteris Hartsenna, and she was known as a “Liberator” (though she did not detail what exactly a “Liberator” was.) She only told them the names of her comrades. The oral tradition had been passed down the tribe that lived before Felbergan was even formed. They were told not to be hostile toward those who passed the trial of a Great Labyrinth, as they were people of extraordinary ability.

Alfrick reacted to the crest on Orcus’s ring because there was a stone monument in which the seven crests were carved at the roots of the Great Tree.

「So I have the qualifications…」

Hajime understood why Alfrick invited humans to the stronghold of Demi- humans. However, not all demi-humans knew of this story, so it would be necessary to alert them in the future.

By the time Hajime and Alfrick ended their conversation, it had become noisy downstairs. Hajime and the others were currently on the top floor while Shia and the Haulia Family were on the floor below. There was apparently an argument. Hajime and Alfrick looked at each other and stood up at the same time.

Below, there was a bearman, a tigerman, a foxman, a winged demi-human, and a hairy dwarf; they were glaring at the Haulia Family.

In the corner of the room, Cam desperately covered Shia. They had been hit already, since Shia and Cam had swollen cheeks.

Hajime and Yue, who came downstairs, sent a sharp gaze to everyone. The bearman began speaking in an irritated voice.

「Alfrick… you bastard, what is the meaning of this? Why did you invite humans here? That Rabbit Clan, too. To have the taboo child come here… Depending on your answer, I will strip you of your seat at the Elders' Conference.」

He was desperately restraining his fury. His fists were trembling. As expected, for Demi- humans, Humans were the enemy. Furthermore, to invite the Haulia Family who bore the crime of sheltering the forbidden child, it was not just the bearman but all others who stared at Alfrick.

Alfrick simply stood there calmly.

「What, I was simply following our tradition. All of you are also elders of various tribes, correct? You should be able to understand the circumstances.」

「The hell with tradition! Those are fake anyway, aren't they? Even after Felbergan was founded, nothing has happened!」

「Which means this would be the first time. That is all. If you are all elders, then follow the tradition. That is our law. We are the elders, so why should we disregard our law?」

「Then you're saying those human brats are qualified!? They're so strong we should not be hostile toward them!?」

「Correct.」

Alfrick answered indifferently. The bearman could not believe Alfrick's word and stared at Hajime.

In Felbergan, those who held an Elder's seat were powerful, and the Elders' Conference was a system used to decide the policies of the country. The demi-humans gathered here were the current elders. However, there was clearly a difference in how they saw tradition.

Though Alfrick was the type that saw importance in tradition, the other elders thought differently. Alfrick was of the Forest Clan, and, even amongst demi-humans, his race had longer life spans. According to Hajime's memory, their average lifespan was approximately 200 years compared to the average 100 years of other Demi-humans. In that case, there was a large age gap between Alfrick and the others. There was a difference in their sense of values.

Because of this, the other elders were unable to endure having humans and criminals in this place.

「… Then allow me to test you!」

Having finished his words, the bearman suddenly rushed toward Hajime. Because of his sudden movement, no one could react. Alfrick, too, did not think he would attack so suddenly and had a surprised expression.

The instant he was in range, the man, 2.5 meters high with muscular arms, took a swing at Hajime.

Even amongst Demi- humans, the Bear Clan was superior in physical strength and endurance. His arms were capable of breaking a thick tree in two, and his destructive power was clear as representative of his tribe. Aside from the Haulia Family and Yue, everyone expected nothing to be left of Hajime but a lump of flesh.

However, they froze from the scene before them. The fist that swung downward produced a sound of impact as it was easily grabbed and stopped by Hajime's left arm.

「… What a weak fist. But there's definitely killing intent here. You've prepared yourself, right?」

While saying this, Hajime manipulated his artificial arm with magic to strengthen his grip. The bearman's bones could be heard breaking. Sensing a crisis, the demi-human tried to take distance.

「Guuu!Let go!」

Though he tried desperately to pull back, Hajime, who was only half his size, did not budge an inch. In truth, Hajime had performed Transmute on a metal plate at the base of his shoes to create spikes which drilled into the floor, securing his position. The bearman could only feel as if Hajime was an immovable tree.

Hajime silently poured his magic into his artificial arm.

「!?」

Something could be heard breaking in his arm. Even so, he did not scream. As expected of an elder. Even so, Hajime did not miss him stiffen in pain.He then loosened his left arm's grip and

jumped into the demi-human's bosom, thrusting forward. 「Fly.」

He activated "Strong Arm" and released a shot from his elbow, increasing the thrust his arm produced as a cartridge ejected into the air. His fist, which had been strong to begin with, was accelerated to increase its destructive power.

His fist pierced through the belly of the bearman without mercy and generated a shock wave which blew him away. Without even a chance to scream, the bearman's body bent, and he disappeared, breaking through the wall. After some time, his scream was audible.

Hajime had fired a slug from his elbow, using the recoil to accelerate his fist. He could do the same using Schlag as well to attack enemies behind him. Alongside "Strong Arm," he was able to fully demonstrate his power.

While everyone was stunned, Hajime looked at the other elders with killing intent.

「So, are you my enemies?」 No one was able to nod.

After Hajime had blown away the bearman, Alfrick was able to intervene so Hajime would not crush others. The bearman's internal organs were ruptured, and many of his bones were fractured, but his life was intact. He would have to use the most expensive recovery medicines to heal, but his life as a warrior was finished…

Currently, the Elders, Zell of the Tiger Clan, Mao of the Winged Clan, Rua of the Fox Clan, Guze of the Earth Clan (the so called dwarves), and Alfrick of the Forest Clan were seated opposite Hajime. Yue and Cam sat beside Hajime, and Shia sat with the other Haulia clustered behind him.

The elders, except Alfrick, were stiff with tension. The bearman (Jin) who was amongst the top two in terms of battle prowess was being attended to, unable to use either hands or feet at this time.

「So? What do you want with us? I just want to go beneath the Great Tree. If you don't interfere, then I'll leave you alone… If you don't get everyone else on the same page, it won't be good if there's a misunderstanding, right? I'm not such a good-natured person that I would distinguish friend from foe in the midst of battle.」

Having heard Hajime's words, the elders were stunned. His words implied that he would not hesitate to start a war with Demi-humans.

「For the sake of our incapacitated companion… is it possible to start a friendly relationship?」

Guze muttered quietly with a bitter expression.

「Huh? What was that? That bear was the one who showed his killing intent to me, wasn't he? I just paid him back. Him falling into that state was his own fault.」

「Y, you! Jin! Jin was only thinking of his country!」

「Is that reason enough to kill someone he met for the first time without talking first?」

「Th, that's! But!」

「Don't you understand? I'm the victim, and he's the assailant. You're not misjudging a crime, are you? One of you elders made the mistake, right?」

Guze likely had gotten along well with Jin. While he understood what Hajime was saying, it was difficult for him to accept it. Even so, considering his feelings was not something Hajime would do.

「Guze, I understand how you feel, but leave it at that. His is a sound argument.」

Hearing Alfrick's admonishment, Guze could only stand up quickly. He eventually sat down with a distorted expression and fell silent.

「This boy certainly has one of the crests, which proves he has completed one of the Great Labyrinths. Based on the tradition, I can accept him.」

The elder, Rua, of the Fox Clan spoke. After his narrow eyes looked at Hajime, he looked at the other elders, waiting to hear what they thought. Mao of the Winged Clan and Zell of the Tiger Clan gave their consent, though it was unknown what they truly thought. On the others' behalf, Alfrick spoke to Hajime.

「Nagumo Hajime. We of the Elder Council admit you are qualified per our traditions. For that reason, we will not oppose you… As much as possible, I will command them not to lay a hand on you… however…」

「No guarantees… huh?」

「Yes. As you know, Demi- humans do not think well of Humans. Honestly, it is closer to say we hate them. There is the possibility that they may disregard our notice. This is especially true of the Bear Clan with Jin incapacitated. Their anger is difficult to suppress, and he is well liked..」

「So?」

Hajime's expression did not change, even after hearing Alfrick's words. What was done was done. He only did what he should have, his eyes were saying it all. Alfrick, understanding that, looked back with the will of an elder.

「I hope you can spare those who attack you.」

「… You're telling me to take it easy on those who come at me with the intent to kill?」

「That is correct. It is possible with your power, correct?」 「If it's

someone with an ability near that bear's, I can't say for

sure. However, I won't take it easy when we're trying to kill one another. I understand how you feel, but I can't relate to your circumstances. If you don't want your brethren to die, then do everything you can to stop them.」

They were the sense of values he cultivated in the Abyss; they were deeply ingrained in Hajime's mind. Even he did not know what would happen when fighting seriously; however, if he took it easy, even a cornered mouse could mortally wound a cat. For that reason, Hajime could not accept Alfrick's request.

However, Zell of the Tiger Clan intervened.

「Then we will refuse to guide you to the Great Tree. Even if it is tradition, there is no need to guide someone we dislike.」

Having heard this, Hajime was dumbfounded. From the start, he was leaving it to the Haulia Family to guide him there. He had no intention of seeking help from those of Felbergan. Even they knew that; however, Zell's next words clarified everything.

「I doubt the Haulia Family can guide you. They are criminals, and they will be judged by Felbergan's rules. Though we do not know what has happened, you will separate here. Their crime was to harbor this child who has the same power as demons. This is no different from exposing Felbergan to danger. Their execution has already been decided.」

Shia trembled while Cam and the others were resigned. Even now, no one blamed Shia; that was simply how deep their affection was.

「Honored Elders! Please, let my family go! Please!」

「Shia! Stop it! We have long since been prepared. This is not your fault. No one here wishes to stay alive enough to throw aside our family. We have talked about this numerous times. There is nothing for you to worry about.」

「But Father!」

Though Shia desperately begged, no words of pardon came from Zell.

「It has already been decided. All of the Haulia Family will be executed here. Even if you had remained out of Felbergan, your entire family would have been banished for harboring you.」

Shia cried and was comforted by Cam and the others. The decision was final, and the other Elders had nothing to say. It was likely because they had concealed such a dangerous factor in Felbergan, making their crime heavy. Their strong feelings as family only worsened the situation; it was an ironic situation.

「With this, your means of reaching the Great Tree are gone. What will you do? Will you leave it to luck?」

Zell implied that Hajime should accept their demands. The other elders did not show any objection. However, Hajime showed no

bitterness in his expression and responded as if there was no problem.

「Are you an idiot?」「Wh, what!?」

Zell looked at Hajime in surprise. Shia and her family also looked at him on reflex. Yue, understanding what Hajime was thinking, remained calm.

「I said it before. I can't relate to your circumstances. If you want to take them from me, then that just means you're in my way.」

Hajime glared at the elders and reached his hand out, patting the crying Shia's head. Shia looked up in surprise.

「If you want to take them from me… then you better be prepared.」

「Hajime-san…」

Hajime was telling them he would not forgive anyone hindering his path any more than this. For the sake of the Haulia Family, he was not going to hesitate in waging war against Felbergan, the stronghold of Demi-humans. His resolution pierced through Shia's heart which was shaken by despair.

「So you are that serious.」

Alfrick looked at Hajime with a sharp gaze, not permitting any deceit.

「Obviously.」

However, Hajime was not shaken. His unyielding resolve was visible. He had no respect for this world, and he did not intend on compromising or pardoning anything that stopped him. It was the decision he made in the Abyss.

「Even if I tell you we will send a guide with you from Felbergan?」

The Elders' Conference had already decided that the Haulia Family was to be executed.

It would affect the country's prestige to overturn their decision and yield to such a threat. Furthermore, the Haulia could not be used as a guide because there was the risk of them being attacked. Alfrick made his proposal with this in mind, but Hajime made it clear there was no room for negotiation.

「Don't make me say it again. My guide is the Haulia.」

「May I hear the reason you are so set on them? If you only wanted to get to the Great Tree, then anyone could be your guide.」

Hajime had an expression as if explaining it was annoying.simply said it would be troublesome as he looked at Shia. For some time now, Shia had been glancing at Hajime, then their eyes met. She felt her heart beat. Even when looking away, she could feel her pulse rising.

「I promised to help them in exchange for their guidance.」

「Promise … If that was your promise, haven't you already fulfilled it? You protected them from the demons of the Gorge and the Empire's soldiers. What is there left for you do? There would be no difference if the one to reward you was different.」

「There's a big problem with that. I promised to ensure their safety while they guide me. Just because there's something better on the way, I can't just toss them aside. That would be…」

Hajime cut his words short and looked at Yue. She had a slight smile. Alfrick could only shrug his shoulders and smile wryly.

「Uncool, right?」

Sneak attacks, surprises, deception, cowardice, bluffs, lies. When killing one another, Hajime did not think they were bad. In order to survive, they were sometimes necessary.

However, he wanted to protect his own honor outside of that. He would hardly be considered human if he did not do that much. Hajime, too, was a man, and for the girl he met in the Abyss, he wanted to make that line clear. He did not want to show disgraceful behavior more than necessary.

Perhaps realizing what Hajime was thinking, Alfrick could only sigh deeply. The other elders looked to him to see what they should do. For a while, silence remained. Before long, Alfrick made a proposal with an exhausted face.

「Then we will simply treat them as your slaves. In accordance to Felbergan law, those who have left the Sea of Trees and have not returned or those who were caught and made into slaves are assumed to have died. Though there is a chance we can win against outsiders inside the fog of the Sea of Trees, we consider them dead so as to limit any damage… There will be no need to execute them.」

「Alfrick, that's!」

It was complete sophism. Naturally, the other elders were speechless. Zell unintentionally leaned forward and began to protest.

「Zell, you should understand the power this boy has shown. If we execute the Haulia Family, then he will be our enemy. How many will die… as elders, we must avoid this danger.」

「But what will our people think! If rumor has it that we yielded to power and let a monstrous child loose, then our prestige will surely fall!」

「However…」

Other elders joined the discussion, and the place became noisy. As expected, having to overlook a risky factor without punishment was not a simple thing to them. If a bad precedence was established, the Elders' Conference would take a severe blow, and people would suspect them.

However, Hajime made a remark without reading the mood.

「Ah～ It might be bad to say it now, but isn't it too late to realize that you're not overlooking Shia alone?」

The discussion stopped. The elders glanced at Hajime, asking what he meant by that.

Hajime slowly pulled his right sleeve up and performed direct magic manipulation. By doing so, crimson lines appeared on his skin. Sparks also were emitted from his right hand as he used “Lightning Clad.”

The elders looked on in astonishment. He had invoked magic without a chant or magic circle. They thought he was only able to defeat Jin because of his artifact.

「I’m just like Shia and can directly manipulate magic as well as use unique magic. Yue is, too. We’re all what you call monsters. Regardless, isn’t your tradition to “not be hostile, no matter who the person is?” According to that law, you must overlook us monsters. I think it’s natural to overlook Shia at this point.」

Though the elders were stunned for a while, they began whispering after some time. Once they reached a conclusion, Alfrick sighed and began speaking.

「Haa～ We will consider the Haulia Family’s taboo child, Shia Haulia, as a relation of Nagumo Hajime who is also a forbidden existence. Since Nagumo Hajime has the qualifications, we will not be hostile toward them; however, you are forbidden from entering Felbergan and its surrounding villages. Also, if anyone tries to lay a hand on Nagumo Hajime or his family, then that will be their responsibility… Is there anything else?」

「Well, whatever, as long as I can reach the Great Tree, then that's fine. They were my guides, so there should be no problem with this.」

「… I see. Then please, hurry and leave. Though it hurts to be unable to welcome someone qualified as dictated by tradition…」

「Don't mind it. There's no need to say anymore, since most of it will be nonsense to me anyway. I can only be grateful that you have such rational judgment.」

Alfrick could only smile wryly while the other elders looked bitter and exhausted. Rather than a grudge, they were clearly just hoping the group would leave. Hajime shrugged his shoulders and urged Yue, Shia, and the Haulia to stand up.

Yue was expressionless from start to finish, and she simply stood up to match Hajime.

However, Shia and the Haulia Family did not believe what had happened. They sat stunned. Though they were prepared to die, they found out they would simply be banished.

「Hey, stop day dreaming, let's go.」

They quickly stood up in a hurry and followed after Hajime. Alfrick and the others sent them off at the gate.

After passing through the gate, Shia asked Hajime while flustered.
「U, Um, is it okay… for us to live?」

「? Weren't you listening before?」

「W, well, even if I heard it… it doesn't seem real… It felt unbelievable…」

Her confusion was shared by all the Haulia Family. For Demi-humans, the decision of the Elders' Conference was absolute. Yue spoke to Shia who was still confused.

「… It's fine to be happy.」「Yue-san?」

「… Hajime saved you. It's the truth. Just accept it.」「… 」

Having heard Yue's words, Shia glanced at Hajime who quietly walked next to her. Hajime shrugged while facing forward.

「Well, it was a promise.」「Uu…」

Shia's shoulders were trembling. In exchange for guiding him through the Sea of Trees, Shia and her family were protected. It was a promise Shia desperately made with Hajime.

She had originally seen a future with "Premonition" of Hajime protecting her and her family; however, that future was not

absolute. Depending on her actions, it could change significantly Because of that, Shia “desperately” obtained Hajime’s cooperation. He was a Human, a race known for discriminating against Demi-humans, and she had nothing to offer him. She could only offer herself as a “woman” and her “unique magic.” Even so, that was easily discarded. She cried, not knowing what to do.

Even so, she managed to get him to make the promise with her, feeling that Hajime would keep his promise. Even if she was a Demi-human, she did not feel any sense of discrimination against her.

But, to the end, the “promise to protect” was no certainty. That was why, in order to ease her own anxieties, she asked if he would fight, “even if the enemies are humans.” In fact, without hesitation, he fought against soldiers of the Empire, giving her a great sense of relief.

He had not deserted Shia at this time. He was different from the soldiers, and what he did was essentially declaring war against the Empire. But he still defended his promise without faltering. Yue was right, Hajime had saved Shia and her precious family.

For a while now, her heart had been throbbing. Her face was hot, and she had the impulse to jump up and down. It may have been the joy of knowing her family was safe, but it could also be…

Shia tried to follow Yue’s advice and be honestly happy. She entrusted everything to her emotions and clung to Hajime with full force.

「Hajime-san～! Thank you so much～!」

「Uwa!? What's this, so suddenly!?」「Muu…」

I won't let go, no matter what you do! Shia said as she rubbed her face into Hajime's back. Her face was loose and her cheeks were dyed pink.

Yue, seeing this, groaned in a bad mood. When she thought about doing something, she decided to simply hold Hajime's hand.

Seeing Shia explode in joy, the Haulia Family finally understood they had escaped with their lives. They began sharing their joy to one another.

The elders could only watch them with complex expressions; there were many who averted their gaze in hatred or discomfort.

Hajime, understanding what they were all feeling, simply smiled wryly. He would be involved in such troublesome things for a while now.

Chapter 2

「Now then, I think I'll give you some combat training.」 Hajime and the others, now banished from Felbergan, were

resting in their temporary base near the Great Tree when he suddenly said that. Though it was called a base, it was simply a barrier made of Feldrain Crystals that Hajime nonchalantly stole. While sitting on stumps in this barrier, the rabbit-eared people had dazed expression.

「U, um… Hajime-san. When you say combat training…」 Shia asked on behalf of her perplexed clan.

「Exactly what I said. We can't get to the Great Tree for 10 days, right? Then it's better to make effective use of this time. I'm thinking about making you weak, fragile existences into those who excel in combat.」

「Wh, why are you thinking that…」

Her rabbit ears trembled from the intimidation she felt in Hajime's gaze and body. Shia naturally doubted his abrupt words.

「Why? You just asked why, didn't you? Shameless rabbit.」

「Auu, you're still not calling me by name…」

Hajime looked at Shia with skeptical eyes as he began his explanation.

「Listen, I promised to protect you until you're done guiding me. What will you do afterward? Did you think about it?」

The Haulia Family looked at each other and shook their heads. Cam also had a hard expression. Though they were vaguely uneasy, it was because they had been thrown about here and there by their circumstances and were mentally cornered. Perhaps they had just not thought about it at all.

「Well, looks like you haven't given it any thought. You're weak, so you can only run and hide before malice and the possibility of danger. The place you could retreat to, Felbergan, is now gone. In other words, without my protection, you'll fall into danger

again.」

「「「「「「…」」」」」」

Since he was right, everyone looked down with a dark expression.
「You have no way out, you have no place to hide or protect

yourself. Still, demons and humans will aim for you without mercy. This will only lead to destruction … are you okay with that? Are you fine with being weak and falling to ruin? Is it fine for the lives you luckily kept to be taken away pointlessly? What do you think?」

No one could speak in the gloomy atmosphere. Then someone spoke up.

「There's no way we could!」

The Haulia Family looked up, touched by those words. Shia already had a resolute expression.

「That's right, it's unacceptable. Then what should you do? The answer is simple, just become strong. Attack anything that comes at you and destroy it. Earn things with your own hands.」

「… But we're from the Rabbit Clan. We don't have strong bodies like the Tiger Clan or Bear Clan, nor do we have special abilities like the Winged Clan or the Earth Clan… we are completely…」

It was common sense that the Rabbit Clan was weak, so Hajime's words only brought forth negative emotions. Because they were weak, they could not fight. No matter how much they struggled to get strong as Hajime was saying, they could think of nothing else but their weakness.

Seeing the Haulia Family act like this, Hajime snorted.

「Did you know my classmates once called me "Incompetent?"」
「Eh?」

「"Incompetent." My status and skills were as ordinary as the average person. I was the weakest amongst them, nothing but a burden in combat. That's why they called me "Incompetent." It was the truth.」

All the Haulia Family were surprised by his confession. They could

not believe that Hajime, who was able to easily defeat the demons of Raisen Gorge as well as the elder bearman was someone once called “Incompetent” and “The Weakest.”

「Then I fell into the Abyss and became strong. I didn’t think about whether or not it was possible or impossible. If I didn’t do anything, then I would die. That’s why I fought with everything I had… Before I knew it, I was already like this.」

He spoke indifferently, but the Haulia Family could feel a chill down their entire body.

He was no different from an average human, which meant he was even weaker than the Rabbit Clan. In that situation, he was able to defeat demons even stronger than those in Raisen Gorge. His abilities and the fact that he survived, despite being the weakest, made them tremble in fear imagining the entire situation. They would have been crushed in despair and simply accepted death in resignation. It was the same as how they accepted the decision from the Elders’ Conference.

「You’re in a similar situation now. Promise to yourself, shatter that despair. I don’t care if you think it’s impossible, you’ll only be annihilated next time if you don’t do something. I won’t help you once I’m done here. Well, it’s fine with me if you want to spend what little time remains in your sorry life to lick each others’ wounds.」

So, what will you do? Hajime asked with his eyes. There was no immediate answer. Rather, there were no other answers.

They understood they had no other path to survival other than

becoming strong. It was not like Hajime was protecting them out of some sense of justice. He would surely abandon them after their promise was fulfilled. However, even if they knew that, they were a peaceful, gentle people, far more than any other. Hajime's proposal was akin to them stepping into unknown territory. It was difficult for them to change their way of life so easily.

The Haulia Family looked at each other silently; however, Shia had made her decision earlier and had a resolute expression. She stood up, looking at everyone skeptically.

「I'll do it. Please, teach me how to fight! I don't want to stay weak forever!」

Her shout echoed throughout the area. It was her declaration saying there was no need to think any further. Shia disliked fighting. It was painful and frightening, and, more than anything, it made her sad to hurt or be hurt.

However, it was true she was the cause for her family's current predicament, and she did not want t hem to disappear. For that purpose, Shia wanted to become stronger, even if it went against the nature of the Rabbit Clan.

Shia, with an unyielding determination in her eyes, looked at Hajime. Cam and the others were dumbfounded, but they, too, eventually became resolute. One by one, they stood up until everyone was standing. Cam, representing them all, stepped forward.

「Hajime-dono… Please, teach us.」

His words were few, but there was a strong will within them. It was the will to fight against the injustice that would attack them.

「Very well, you prepared? How much stronger you become depends on your determination. I'm here to give you a hand. Also, I won't be kind to those who drop out along the way. We have 10 days… so get used to dying. What comes after this is life or death, after all.」

Every member of the Haulia Family nodded with determination. Before he began training the Haulia Family, Hajime took out

equipment they would use to train from "Treasure Warehouse" and handed it to them. They were single-edged knives similar to the Japanese kodachi. Hajime had made them with a superior precision and sharpness when he was practicing how to make an ultra-thin blade. They were strong against impact being made of Taur Ore. He took pride in their durability despite their thinness.

After equipping them, he taught them basic movements. Of course, Hajime did not have any knowledge in martial arts, nor were things he got from games or manga. What he taught them were "logical movements" he gained and polished by fighting demons in the Abyss. While doing so, he gave them real combat experience against various demons. The Haulia Family's strength lay in their ability to search and hide. In conclusion, he thought them more suited for group strategies which focused on cooperation and surprise attacks.

As for Shia, she was exclusively trained by Yue in magic. Even if she was a Demi-human, she could use magic, and, being able to directly

manipulate magic, she should have the ability to use magic without chanting or a magic formation so long as she had the knowledge. Shia's screams could occasionally be heard from the other side of the fog, but her training still was going well.

However, on the second day of training, something happened. Hajime was irritated, veins appearing on his head, as he supervised the Haulia Family. Certainly, they were going against their very nature and were taking their training seriously. They had even defeated demons without receiving any wounds.

Gusah!

One of the demons was killed by Hajime's specialized kodachi.
「Ahh, please, forgive me for this～」

The one who said that while clinging to the demon was a man of the Haulia Family. It was as if he was killing his best friend who he had known for a long time.

Bushu!

Again, another demon was felled with a slash. 「I'm sorry! I'm sorry! Even so, I must do this!」

The woman trembled as she cut the neck of a demon, the kodachi gripped in both her hands. The woman apologized as if she had killed her beloved, a victim of a mad love.

Baki!

The dying demon used the last of its strength to attack Cam. He was blown into the air while muttering in self-ridicule.

「Fuu, so this is punishment for those who brandish the sword…

This is a natural result, after all…」

Hearing these words, the Haulia Family began to cry. They shouted to Cam with bitter expressions.

「Chief! Don't say it! We're the sinful ones!」

「That's right! Our time of judgment will come, but it's not now! Please, stand up! Chief!」

「We don't have any other path to go down! Chief, let's go together until death!」

「E, everyone … right, I can't fall here. For the sake of his death (the small demon which looked like a mouse,) we will advance

on!」

「「「「「「「「Chief!」」」」」」」」

A good atmosphere surrounded Cam and his family. Hajime, unable to endure it anymore, cut in.

「Ahhh! You're noisy, idiot! Why the hell are you so dramatic every

time you kill a single demon! Why? Seriously, what are you doing? This is just a cheap play! What's with all the damn drama! Just kill it in silence! Kill it instantly! Don't call demons by some kind of gender! It's disgusting!」

Even if they knew that, the Haulia Family were working hard; however, due to their nature, they could not help but dramatize things every time they killed a demon. This was the second day, and, having seen this repeatedly, Hajime had pointed it out to them numerous times. He slowly ran out of patience.

Hajime trembled, trying to contain his voice and his anger. 「Even if you say that…」and 「I feel sorry for them, even if they are demons…」could be heard from the Haulia Family.

Many more veins appeared on his head. One boy from the Haulia Family could not stand it anymore and tried to approach and calm Hajime. He was the boy Hajime helped against the Hyveria back in 【Raisen Gorge,】and he was especially attached to Hajime.

However, while the boy advanced, trying to say something to Hajime, he suddenly jumped back.

Hajime was dumbfounded and asked the boy. 「? What happened?」

The boy answered while quietly crawling on his hands and knees. 「Ah, yes. I almost stepped on this flower… thank goodness. If I

hadn't noticed it, it would have been crushed. It's so pretty, it would be sad to step on it.」

Hajimes' cheeks convulsed. 「F, flower…?」

「Yeah! Hajime Nii-chan! I really like flowers! There are lots here, so it would be bad if we crushed them while training～」

The rabbit- eared boy smiled brightly. The Haulia Family gazed warmly at the boy.

Hajime slowly looked down. His white hair drooped, hiding his face. He suddenly whispered.

「… You sometimes jumped with strange timing when you were moving… Is it because of these flowers?」

As Hajime said, during their training, the Haulia Family occasionally changed their pace at odd times. Though it was always in his mind, since they connected well with their next attack, it seemed as if they were trying to find easier positions to kill.

「No, no, that can't be. Of course not.」 「Ha ha, right.」

Hajime began to relax hearing Cam; however…

「It was not just the flowers, we were also watching the insects. We managed to avoid them somehow.」

Hearing this, Hajime's expression fell once again. He began to sway like a ghost. While the Haulia Family thought they said something bad, they looked at each other uneasily. Hajime slowly approached the boy and smiled.

Then, with a smile… he crushed the flower. After stepping on it, he ground it with his foot.

The boy looked at it in stunned silence. Finally, Hajime removed his foot to show the remains of the flower laying their tragically.

「The flower~!」

The boy's sorrow could be heard through the Sea of Trees. Everyone looked at Hajime and said, 「What are you doing!」 Hajime turned to look at them with a smile.

「Right, I finally get it. I finally, finally get it. I was too soft. This is my responsibility. It was my mistake to have hope for your tribe. Ha ha, I can't believe you pay attention to flowers and bugs, even in a life and death situation… Combat skills and experience aren't your problem. I should have noticed it sooner. I'm angry at my own inexperience…. Fu fu fu.」

「H, Hajime-dono?」

After Hajime began ominously laughing, Cam timidly called out to him.

His response was…

Dopan!

A gunshot from Donner. Cam was blown back. He flailed through the air and fell down. The non-lethal rubber bullet which hit him dropped down to the ground. The wind blew nearby, and silence reigned supreme. Hajime approached Cam who had fainted and shot a rubber bullet at his belly.

「Hauu!」

Cam woke up with a scream and a fit of coughing. He looked at Hajime with tearful eyes. Despite the surreal spectacle of an old, teary-eyed, bearded, rabbit-eared man sitting like a woman there, Hajime made a declaration.

「You little “***” From this moment on, you “***” will kill those demons as if you’re going to die! Ignore insects and flowers! If you don’t, I’m going to “***!” If you understand, then hunt them now!」

The Haulia Family stiffened hearing Hajime’s language. Hajime fired at them without mercy.

Dopan! Dopan! Dopan! Dopan! Dopan! Dopan!

The Haulia Family scattered into the Sea of Trees like spiders while screaming. The boy desperately clung to Hajime while trembling.

「What happened!? Why did you do this!?」

Hajime glared at the boy who stared at him with sparkling eyes, looked at the surroundings to find the flowers, and silently fired once again. The flowers scattered, one after another. The boy screamed.

「Why～ Why～ Please, stop!」

「Shut it, you shitty brat. Every time you talk pointlessly, I'll shoot at any of the flowers around here. If you're paying even an ounce of attention to a flower, I will make it disappear. If you do nothing, I will make them disappear. If you don't want that, then go kill demons!」

With that said, Hajime began firing at the flowers again. The boy cried and disappeared into the Sea of Trees. After that, cries of "***" could be heard as the Haulia Family screamed.

It was a means of training the Rabbit Clan who was poor in combat by nature. Both their combat skills and their spirit were being honed.

In that way, over 10 days, the Haulia Family were brainwashed, receiving both physical and mental remodeling. Meanwhile, elsewhere, there was another member of the Haulia finishing her training.

Zugan! Doga! Baki Baki Baki! Dogusha!

Tremendous sounds of destruction roared through the Sea of Trees. Some trees were broken in two, there were craters scattered about, and some trees were burning while others were frozen.

The cause of such devastation against nature were two girls. Even now, the destruction was still ongoing!

「Deyaaaaa!!」

A tree 1 meter in diameter was broken along with an ear-splitting yell. It broke down the middle and flew at its target with great speed. The plain tree was given a brutal power, causing destruction in its wake.

「— “Scarlet Spear.”」

A spear of flame burned its target and all before it into ash. Even objects with a large mass were burned by it. It countered the log flying through the air like a cannonball, turning it into ash.

「Not yet!」

The shock wave created by the collision between “Scarlet Spear” and the log dispersed the fog. On the other side of the fog came a running silhouette. A log fell from the sky like a meteor, piercing the ground. The target stepped back to escape from the shock wave. A spear of flame was once again released.

However, the silhouette rushed out of the fog at high speed and sent a flying kick to the log which had pierced the ground. The log receiving the kick exploded, sending splinters at its target.

「! “Blazing Rampart.”」

Suddenly, a wall of flames akin to a rampart appeared, blocking the shots flying through the air; not a single splinter reached the target. However…

「You’re mine!」

「!」

The silhouette moved behind its target. After using the splinters as a distraction, the silhouette had slipped into the fog, grasped a hammer, and brought it down.

「— “Wind Wall.”」

A fierce impact spread as the sledge hammer struck the ground. From the impact, stones were shot out and scattered in every direction; however, the target was able to block the attack, dispersing it with a wind barrier. The target immediately retreated to a safe area and activated a magic to target the silhouette who stood rigid after using such a powerful technique.

「— “Frozen Coffin.”」「Fue! Ah, wai!」

The silhouette desperately called for the opponent to stop. However, in this place, talk was cheap. The attacker tried to escape, but the Ice Magic instantly prevented any means of escape. The attacker’s feet were frozen, and, eventually, only the head remained.

「C, cold～ Hurry up and release it, Yue-san～」「… My victory.」

The two who had been fighting without discussion were Yue and Shia. Today was the 10 th day of training. Mock combat was the final test. The rule was that Shia would win if she could harm Yue even a little. And the result was…

「Uu～ No way～ Ah, there! Yue-san, your cheek! There’s a scratch! A scratch! My attack hit! A ha ha～ I did it! It’s my win!」

Certainly, there was a small scratch on Yue’s cheek. It likely came from one of the debris that broke through her defenses. Though it was a small scratch, a wound was a wound. It was Shia’s victory.

After pointing that out, Shia was overjoyed. She revealed a big smile despite the fact that her body was frozen and her nose was runny. Her rabbit ears twitched happily. There was an important promise she made with Yue for this battle, after all.

The promise was hardly amusing for Yue. For that reason, 「… No wound.」

The wound disappeared immediately thanks to her “Automatic Regeneration.” She turned away and sulked.

「Wh, wha!? That’s unfair! There’s a scratch… I mean, there’s nothing now! But there was one! That’s no fair, cheating! Actually, please end this magic～ I’m cold… ehh, I’m getting sleepy…」

Shia began to doze off, her nose still running. Yue sighed deeply and ended her magic.

「Kchu! Kchu! Auu, Cold～ I almost became a rabbit who couldn’t return.」

After a cute sneeze, she covered her nose with a nearby leaf. Shia looked at Yue with a serious gaze. Yue had an unpleasant expression. Her expressionless face had given way in her annoyance.

「Yue-san, I won.」「… Mm.」

「We promised, right?」「…… Mm.」

「If I win at least once in these 10 days… you'll take me along with you, right?」

「…… Mm.」

「At the very least, you'll help me convince Hajime-san, right?」
「…… What's there to eat?」

「Wait! Don't suddenly change topic! And Yue-san, aren't you fine with anything as long as you have Hajime-san's blood! Why are you asking about breakfast! Please, help me! If I have you as an ally, it's already 90% *OK*!」

Shia was making a ruckus. Yue looked at her deeply.

As Shia said, Yue had made a promise. If Shia was able to damage her in a mock battle, even a small wound, within the 10 days, she would acknowledge Shia and allow her to travel with her and Hajime. She would also help persuade Hajime to take Shia along.

Shia seriously wanted to go with Hajime and Yue. Half was because she did not want to become a burden to her family, and half was simply because she wanted to stay with them.

However, she was refused coldly. Even now, that was clear from their attitude. At that time, Shia thought of the promise from before.

In Shia's eyes, Hajime pampered Yue by fulfilling her requests. Above all, Shia was a woman. She understood Yue's feelings toward Hajime. Naturally, she, too, had the same emotions. As such, the reverse was true, and Yue could understand Shia's feelings. For that reason, it was necessary to make Yue acknowledge the existence of Shia Haulia.

It was not like Shia wanted to take Hajime from Yue. She was not thinking about that at all; she simply wanted Hajime to acknowledge her existence like Yue, even a little. In this world, they were all the "same." In other words, she wanted to be their "friend." She wanted a friend and someone she loved by her side. That was the future Shia dreamed of.

As for why Yue agreed to the promise despite there being no merits for her, 20% was because she felt sympathy. When she heard Shia's story for the first time in Raisen Gorge, though she had complicated feelings since Shia's circumstances were far better than her own, somewhere in her heart, she could not deny that they were the "same." Since she thought of them as similar, if only a little, she "pampered" Shia.

The other 80% was… her stubborn nature as a woman. Yue simply accepted Shia's proposal. That is, she was saying 「Let's see if you'll be a burden or not. Whether you come or not, I will show you that I will always be beside Hajime.」 It was her challenge to fight over the man she loved. She did not think another would could come close to her; however, when she saw Shia, who was the "same," as an opponent as well as Shia's enthusiasm and terrific concentration,

Yue felt it impossible to remain silent.

As a result, the promised match was won by Shia.

「… Haa, I understand. I will stand by our promise… 」

「Really!? Like I thought, there's no need to stop now～! Please keep your end of the bargain up! 」

「…… Mm. 」

「That pause was a bit strange… You will do it, right? 」「… Persistent. 」

Reluctantly, Yue admitted to Shia's victory. Shia was a little uneasy about how Yue responded, but still felt relief and joy since she knew Yue was similar to Hajime in that she would not break her promises.

Slowly, the Haulia Family's training came to an end. The gloomy Yue and the cheerful Shia returned to Hajime's side.

When Yue and Shia arrived to where Hajime was, Hajime had his eyes closed and his arms crossed as he leaned against a nearby tree. Perhaps because he noticed their presence, he slowly opened his eyes and turned to them. While looking at the two suspiciously, as they had completely different moods, he raised a hand and called out.

「Yo, you two. Did the match end? 」

Hajime had heard there was a bet between the two. Hajime was also the one who prepared Shia's extremely heavy sledgehammer. Shia, with an eager expression in her desire to defeat Yue, asked for

a new weapon. Yue herself did not object. Though he did not know the content of the bet, nor would they tell him, since there would be no major disadvantage for Yue, he made it for Shia.

In truth, Hajime thought, if Yue and Shia fought, Yue would win. He already understood Yue's abilities from their time in the Abyss. Even if Shia was able to directly manipulate magic, she was different, having been immersed in peaceful times.

However, given their expressions, Hajime was internally surprised that his expectations were overthrown. Shia cheerfully spoke to Hajime.

「Hajime-san! Hajime-san! Please listen! I, I was finally able to win against Yue-san! It's a big victory! Well,～ I want to show it to you, Hajime-san～ My magnificent fighting! The time when Yue-san admits def Hebu!?」

Shia tried to explain how their match was settled through her gestures, but she was getting too into it, so Yue jumped in and slapped her away, causing Shia to crash into the ground after spinning. Shia could only twitch.

Yue turned around in a bad mood. Hajime spoke to her with a wry smile.

「So? What happened?」

Rather than the match results, Hajime asked about the content. The fact that Yue lost was not something he could easily believe. No

matter what, anyone would think Shia's claims were a lie.

Yue had an air of not wanting to talk about anything, but, not wanting to hide anything, she reluctantly answered Hajime's question.

「… Magic aptitude is similar to Hajime's.」

「Good. It would be a waste of a treasure otherwise… so? That's not all, right? To be troubled by a sledgehammer like that…」

「… Mm, she specializes in body strengthening. She's a monster.」
「… Hmm, compared to us?」

Hajime narrowed his eyes hearing Yue's evaluation. Honestly, it was far beyond his imagination. Strangely enough, her expressionless face was destroyed as she had a bitter face while talking about this subject. She looked in his eyes and responded frankly.

「… Compared to normal Hajime… About 60%.」「Seriously… is that the max?」

「Mm… But there's room for improvement, probably.」「Hoo, that really is at the level of a monster.」

Hajime was secretly surprised having heard Yue talk about Shia's monstrous power. He looked silently at Shia.

If it was around 60% of Hajime's strength without any additional strengthening, Shia's stats would be around the 6000 mark. It was about twice as strong as the truly strengthened Hero. It was truly a power worthy of being called "monstrous." It could be said she was capable of reaching Yue. It was unimaginable from her typical sobbing and whimpering.

Shia noticed Hajime's half-astonished gaze. She stood up cheerfully and walked to Hajime, desperately controlling her rushing emotions.

She straightened her posture, her blue-gray hair fluttering in the air, her rabbit ears standing straight up. She would, at this time, express her once in a lifetime request. Well… it could be a form of a confession as well. Her body trembled with nervousness. Even her face was stiff; still, she advanced, step by step with an unyielding spirit in her eyes. She firmly matched Hajime's gaze.

「Hajime-san. Please take me along on your travels. Please!」「I refuse.」

「An immediate answer!?」

Given the mood, Shia did not think she would be so easily refused. 「What is she saying so suddenly?」Hajime's eyes were saying. He looked at her as if she were shameless.

Shia stood indignantly.

「Th, that's mean, Hajime-san. Even though I was seriously asking, to so easily…」

「Well, even if you tell me that, it wouldn't matter how much you ask. First of all, what about Cam and the others? You're not trying to take them along, are you?」

「N, no! Just me! I already talked to Father and the others. Even if they didn't think I was a burden… um…」

「Hm? What is it?」

Shia suddenly grew bashful. She peeked upwardly at Hajime and played with the tips of her fingers. It was a sly, cunning gesture. Hajime looked suspiciously at Shia.

To the side, Yue stared at Shia in irritation. 「That is… I, I just want to follow my…」

「Haa? What are you saying? If it's now, you won't be a burden to your family, right? With your power, there shouldn't be anyone

you can't beat in general.」「…」

Shia had bashfully tried to answer, but Hajime had reached the limits of his patience. He pulled out Donner. Though he had not noticed, by this time, Shia had thought to herself, 「It's all about a woman's courage!」and voiced out her desires.

「I want to be by your side, Hajime-san! I like you!」「… Haa?」

I said it! Shia thought while panicking. Hajime had a dumbfounded expression, as if he were a bird which ate a toy pellet. He looked exactly like a person who did not understand what had just happened. After a while, the meaning finally sank in and he instinctively responded.

「No, no, no, isn't this weird? Where the hell did I raise a flag? Even though I shouldn't be saying this, I was treating you really badly… Don't tell me, do you get off on that?」

Shia never thought he would think of her in that way and took a step back, filled with regret. Shia fiercely protested.

「What kind of pervert do you think I am! I don't have that kind of hobby! Rather, if you noticed you were treating me so badly, why couldn't you be a bit nicer…」

「Well, there's no need to be nicer to you … Actually, are you really in love with me? Aren't you just being affected by the situation?」

Hajime did not believe Shia since he thought it was something akin to the Suspension Bridge Effect. It could not be helped, though, since everyone could see Hajime acted harshly to Shia in every respect. However, Shia, having her feelings doubted, was in a bad mood.

「It has nothing to do with the circumstances. No matter how many times you saved me, my thoughts would not have changed… though I was glad you protected your promise in front of the

elders… certainly, that may have affected me, but these feelings are already here, so I don't know what to do with them. Even I think about these things sometimes. Something like 『Why was it this person?』 Hajime-san, even now, you refuse to call me by name, and it hurts every time I notice it. You're just like a demon, answering only what is necessary, you throw yourself into crowds of demons, you're merciless, just like a demon, you're never nice to me, you only treat Yue-san kindly; you're just like a demon… Eh? Really, why do I like you? Huh? 」

While speaking, Shia began doubting her own feelings. She tilted her head while Hajime clearly seemed agitated. He could barely resist pulling out Donner.

「A, anyway, I can't let you come along, no matter what you feel. 」

「Th, that was a joke just now, okay? I really do like you, so take me along! 」

「You know, your feelings are… well, even if they are real, don't you understand that I already have Yue? Rather, to confess right in front of her… I've thought about it a while ago, but your number one weapon could be your body strengthening, but that's not it, right? It's that heart of yours which is like Azanthium. 」

「Who are you saying has a heart made of the strongest ore! Uu~ It's exactly as I expected… Fine, I get it. You're every bit as tricky as I thought! 」

Suddenly, Shia laughed suspiciously.

「Because I thought this might happen, I gained an ally at the risk of my life! Now, Yue-sensei! Please help me!」

「Haa? Yue?」

Hajime blinked hearing an unexpected name.

I got you! Shia's smug expression said it all as she glanced at Yue to her side.

Yue looked bitter, as if she was forced to eat hundreds of insects. Then she, truly in an unwilling manner, spoke to Hajime.

「…… Hajime, let's take her along.」

「No, no, no, what was with that pause? You obviously don't like this… Could it be, the bet…」

「… Unfortunately.」

Hajime roughly understood the circumstances as Yue dropped her shoulders.

He no longer felt anger but amazement. Shia was thinking that, to get Hajime to listen to her wish, power would not suffice. She had remembered how Hajime took Yue's words as a priority in decision making.

As such, she devised a means to make Yue her ally. It was no

exaggeration to say she was risking her life, since she knew it would be possible having understood Yue's feelings. In the past 10 days, she had been literally dying to pvercome Yue. In other words, that was how serious Shia thought about this.

Hajime scratched his head. Even if he saw Yue reluctantly accept Shia, there was still no reason for him to take Shia along. In the end, it was a matter of Hajime's feelings.

Yue shrugged her shoulders, as if saying it was unavoidable. She had watched, more than anyone else, how hard Shia worked to overcome any obstacle in front of her. For that reason, Yue was willing to let her become a travel companion. From the start, she never felt hatred for Shia, nor did she hate Shia's feelings toward Hajime.

On the other hand, Shia, who asked Yue for help, had a triumphant expression which steadily became one of unease. Shia had done everything she could, so she could only wait for fate to dictate what happened.

Hajime took a deep breath and looked straight into Shia's eyes. He spun words, one by one. Shia slowly regained her strength hearing his words.

「You already know whether you can go with us or not, don't you?」

「Didn't you know? The future isn't certain.」

Shia said this because she had caught glimpse of the future. She believed the future could change based on her actions and

resolution.

「Our journey is full of danger.」

「I'm glad I'm a monster. I can go with you thanks to that.」
Though it was a derogatory insult the elders had called her, she

took it with pride. After all, she had learned there were some things she could not be capable of accomplishing without being a monster.

「My goal is to return to my home. You will likely never see your family again, you understand?」

「I have talked to my family about this. Even so, they understand.」

They were the family which had protected her until now. There were no words that could express her gratitude. They were a family that was always together, no matter what. When she told them of her feelings, they smiled; there was no need for words.

「My home isn't a place you can easily live in.」「I will say it again. Even so, I wish to go.」

Shia had expressed all her emotions. She would not be stopped with words alone. She could not be stopped. That was the

feeling she had. 「…」

「Fu fu, is that all? Then it's my win, right?」「What win…」

「My feelings won… Hajime-san.」「… What's with that?」

Once more, Shia Haulia spoke of her true desire. 「… Please take me with you.」

Hajime and Shia looked at each other. Hajime looked deeply into her blue eyes, confirming her resolution.

Then…

「… Haa~ Do what you like. Quite a curious one.」

Perhaps he had seen something in her eyes; before long, Hajime let out a sigh and gave up.

Within the Sea of Trees, one shout of joy and a grunt echoed.

Hajime could only smile wryly thinking about the trouble that would come from now on.

Having been granted permission to accompany then, Shia was in a great mood. With both hands on her cheeks, she had a loose expression and was laughing strangely while twisting her body about. It was a shameless appearance. It was so shameless that her previous seriousness when confronting Hajime was like a lie.

「… Digusting.」

Yue muttered, unable to stand it anymore. Shia's excellent rabbit ears caught her words.

「Wh, who is disgusting! Why would you call me disgusting! I've just never been this happy, it can't be helped! After all, isn't this my first time seeing Hajime's dere side? You saw it, too, right? His expression. My chest went tight~ It won't be long before he is hopelessly in love with me~」

Shia was elated and was becoming more caught up in her feelings. Seeing this, Hajime and Yue muttered together in disgusting.

「「… Annoying rabbit.」」

「Wh, wha!? What was that, calling me an annoying rabbit! Please call me by my name~ We're traveling companions~

Don't tell me, are you that unwilling to call me by my name?」

「「…」」

「Why are you silent! Please, don't look away~ Come on, it's Shia, Shia~ Repeat after me, Shia~」

While Shia desperately tried to get them to call her by her name, they simply narrowed their eyes and discussed their future plans. Shia clung to them with wet eyes, saying 「Don't ignore me~ I don't want to be left out~」 Even after they had become traveling companions, they treated her just as harshly as before.

While someone (Shia) was making a racket, several of the Haulia Family appeared from the fog; they had returned after clearing Hajime's challenge which was to subdue a demon and return with proof in their hands. One of those that returned was Cam.

Shia smiled widely, having seen her family for the first time in days. The last time she had seen them was when she spoke to them about her feelings before their training started. Even if it had only been 10 days, every day was filled with deadly training. She had required intense concentration, so, for Shia, it felt as if they had not met for months.

Shia began talking to her father, Cam, immediately. There was so much to tell. However, before she could say anything, Shia swallowed her words. She noticed a strange atmosphere surrounding them.

Cam, who saw Shia, showed a small smile. Immediately, his gaze returned to Hajime. Then…

「Boss, about the demon, have we returned on time?」

「B, Boss? F, father? Your tone… rather, you've completely changed… 」

Because of how her father was speaking and behaving, Shia was puzzled; however, she was ignored. Cam pulled out claws from a demon which was considered one of the stronger demons in the Sea of Trees.

「… I thought I said one was enough… 」

The challenge set by Hajime was to hunt a high ranking demon, one for each team; however, the parts they pulled out showed there were enough for ten. In response to Hajime's question, Cam and the others smiled fearlessly.

「That's what you told us. But while we were doing that, its companions came out… and since they impudently pointed their killing intent at us, we politely welcomed them. Right, everyone? 」

「That's right, Boss. They were pretty reckless for demons. 」「We didn't miss a single one, right? 」

「They were noisy, but… their screams were good, fu fu. 」「Well, it'll serve as a good warning… 」

「Wasn't it enough that we chopped them to pieces? 」

What followed was a parade of disturbing remarks. There was not a single trace of the originally peaceful and gentle Rabbit Clan. They reported the results of their dangerous combat to Hajime with

fearless gazes.

Stunned, Shia could only utter a single word. 「… Who?」

Shia was stunned seeing her family who had completely changed, but she quickly pressed Hajime who was obviously the cause.

「Wh, what happened!? Hajime-san! What happened to Father and everyone!?」

「C, calm down! N, nothing happened… it was just the result of training…」

「No, no, what happened to make them likes this!? Aren't they completely different people? Wait, don't look away! Look at me!」

「… It's not like there are any big differences, right?」

「You're clearly avoiding my question! Please look at them! They're completely charmed by their knives and are staring at them now! Ahh, he just called his knife Julia! Isn't that scary normally?」

Shia's voice was filled with anger and frustration. What in the world happened! That was when Cam and the others looked between Hajime and Shia in confusion. They exchanged glances for a while until the other members of the Haulia Family returned. All of them were… wild. Not only the males but the females as well; even the elderly and children had that look.

Hajime awkwardly averted his gaze as he was interrogated. Perhaps judging she would make no progress, she turned to Cam and the others.

「Father! Everyone! What happened!? It's like you're different people! You've just been saying scary things for a while now…

Please, return to your senses!」

Cam, who was being held by Shia, reverted to his gentle expression, giving Shia a sense of relief. However…

「What are you saying, Shia? We're fine. We've just awoken to the truth of this world. It's all thanks to the Boss.」

「Th, the truth? What is that?」

Shia had a bad feeling and asked, her cheek twitching. Cam smiled as he made a confident declaration.

「90% of the world's problems can be solved with violence.」

「You're different after all! My gentle father is dead~ Uwaaaa~!」
Due to the shock, Shia ran and disappeared into the Sea of Trees

while crying. However, before she got to the fog, a small shadow immediately appeared before her, causing her to fall back. The small shadow was able to keep its balance without falling. Then it stretched its hand out toward Shia.

「Th, thank you very much.」

「Think nothing of it, Shia-anego. It's natural for a man.」「A, anego?」

What appeared from the fog was the boy from the Haulia Family who was but a child. On his shoulder was a large crossbow while he had a slingshot and two knives on his waist. He had a nihilistic smile. Shia, who had never been called "Anego" looked up at him. In front of her was a boy who had always called her "Shia Onee-chan," so she was puzzled.

With Shia staring at him skeptically, the boy walked up in front of Hajime and saluted him.

「Boss! I'm sorry to come back empty-handed! There's something I must report! Permission to speak!」

「R, right? What is it?」

Seeing the boy act like a veteran soldier, though it was a bit too late at this point, Hajime thought Shia was right and that he may have gone too far. He even stuttered a little. The boy continued speaking without a care.

「Yes! I found a problem while pursuing demons! I discovered a group of fully armed bearmen. They were en route to the Great Tree. Perhaps they were thinking of ambushing us!」

「Ah, so they came as expected. I thought they'd come immediately… I see, they want to crush us right in front of our goal. Not bad… so?」

「Sir! How about leaving them to the Haulia!」

「Hmm~ How about it, Cam? You have anything to say?」

Having heard this, Cam was shaken, as if he had been hoping for this. He grinned fearlessly and nodded.

「By all means. We want to know our strength… How far have we come, how are we compared to them. What~ It's not like we'll show you anything disgraceful.」

Having heard their Chief's words, the surrounding Haulia Family showed belligerent expressions. The number of people who called their weapons by name with affection grew. Shia had a look of despair.

「… Can you do it?」「Of course!」

The one who cheerfully responded to Hajime was the boy. Hajime closed his eyes, took a deep breath, and opened his eyes again.

「Hear me! Haulia Family! Every one of you is a brave and resolute warrior! Today, you have graduated from being maggots! You are no longer worthless existences to be weeded out! Crush injustice with your power! Hold down the hostile with wisdom! Great warriors! Give those bears "***" for inciting our anger! They are nothing but stepping stones! They are only "***!" Build mountains with their corpses, rivers with their blood! Show proof that you have been reborn! Show

everyone in the Sea of Trees what the Haulia Family truly is!」

「「「「「「「「「「*Sir, yes, sir!!*」」」」」」」」」」

「Answer me! Everyone! You are the greatest warriors! What is it you desire!」

「「「「「「「「「「Kill!! Kill! Kill!」」」」」」」」」」

「What do you do best!」

「「「「「「「「「「Kill!! Kill! Kill!」」」」」」」」」」

「If you see an enemy, what will you do!」

「「「「「「「「「「Kill!! Kill! Kill!」」」」」」」」」」

「That's right! Kill them all! You can do it! Take the right to live with your own hands!」

「「「「「「「「「「*Aye, aye, Sir!!*」」」」」」」」」」

「That's the spirit! Haulia Family! I have but one order! Search and destroy! Go!!」

「「「「「「「「「「*YAHAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!!!!*」」」」」」」」」」

「Uwaa～ My family is dead after all～」

Under Hajime's command, the Haulia Family disappeared into the fog. The family which was once gentle, peaceful, and, above all, weak in a fight … had long since gone. Having seen her family completely change, Shia collapsed while crying vainly. As expected, she could not stand it. Yue stroked Shia's head in comfort.

When the boy beside Shia, who was sobbing, tried to go, Shia called him to a stop.

「Pal-kun! Please wait! L, look, don't you see this beautiful flower over here? Even if you don't go… How about you wait here with Onee-chan? Okay? How about it?」

She was trying to at least bring this little boy back to his former self. She pointed at a beautiful flower while desperately trying to persuade him. The reason she used a flower was because he once loved them, often naming them before.

The flower boy, named Pal, shook his head and shrugged his shoulders as he sighed.

「Anego, please don't open up old wounds. I've already gotten over my past. The weak mind which enjoyed the beauty of flowers is no more.」

The boy, Pal-kun, was only 11 years old.

「O, Old wound? Gotten over your past? Wait, I don't understand, don't you like flowers anymore?」

「I've thrown those feelings away already.」

「Even though you used to love them so much…」 「A mistake of youth.」

Again, Pal-kun was only 11 years old this year. 「More importantly, Anego.」

「Wh, what is it?」

Having seen the changes in this boy who had picked flowers and called out to her, “Shia Onee- chan! Shia Onee-chan!” she began to escape from reality. She was barely able to respond to his words. This only provided yet another reason to further pursue her escapism.

「I’ve also thrown away my weak name. My name now is Blood Field. Please call me “Bullet Field of Extinction” from now on.」

「Who is that!? Where did Bullet Field come from!? Rather, why Extinction!?」

「Oh, sorry. My comrades are waiting. It’s time to go. I’m off!」
「Ah, wait! What do you mean by that! We haven’t finished tal,

eh, fast! Wait! Please wait～」

Like a woman left behind by her lover, Shia collapsed as her hand tried to reach to the other side of the fog. No one could answer her. This girl’s family had gone out to the battlefield. Shia’s shoulders drooped, and she began crying again. The family she knew was long gone. It was truly a pitiful sight.

Yue had a delicate expression, since she could say nothing to Shia. Hajime, somewhat awkward now, let his gaze wander. Yue turned

to him and bluntly muttered.

「… As expected of Hajime. Accomplishing the impossible.」

「Honestly, why do you know those references..」「… Using Dark Magic, brainwashing… Amazing.」

「… Honestly, even I'm thinking it was a bit too much. Even so, I'm not going to regret it or reflect on it.」

For a while, only Shia's crying could be heard.

Regin Banton was a powerful man, rumored to be the next chief of the Banton Family, a family of the Bear Clan. He idolized the current elder, Jin Banton, and became his right hand.

It was not just Regin; it could be said Jin was popular amongst the Banton Family as a whole, especially the young. The reason was because Jin was broad minded, had a deep sense of patriotism, and, above all else, was strong, which allowed him to be considered as one of the greatest amongst Demi-humans.

For that reason, when the Bear Clan heard the news, they thought it was just a bad joke. They could not believe their beloved elder was incapacitated by a human. However, the merciless reality was proven. Jin was powerless in the medical facility.

Regin was dumbfounded to see Jin's current appearance. His anger

and hatred surfaced next. While bearing these feelings within his heart, he pressed the elders to see under what circumstances this happened. When Regin learned everything, he ignored the elders and told the Bear Clan everything. And so, they went out for vengeance.

Due to the elders' and other clans' attempts to persuade them, not everyone of the Bear Clan followed him; however, the young from the Banton Family who admired Jin left to defeat the spiteful human. They numbered around fifty people. Regin and the others already knew their enemy's objective and thought it best to attack the enemy before the Great Tree as a form of vengeance. They thought, 「Dying before your goal is the best form of revenge.」

Their enemies only consisted of a few humans and rabbit people. Even if Jin was defeated, they thought something cowardly, like a surprise attack, had been used. They thought there was nothing to fear of the humans whose senses would go mad in the Sea of Trees.

「What's going on!?」

Regin screamed in disbelief. The reason was because of the impossible scene before his eyes. The Rabbit Clan, the weakest of all Demi-humans, were cornering the Bear Clan, the strongest in combat.

「Come on! Show us your fighting spirit! Show us or you'll be cut!」

「A ha ha ha ha ha, scream, little piggies!」

「Time to clean up the filth! Hya ha ha ha ha ha!」

While the Haulia Family assaulted them with countless fatal, murderous attacks, their loud laughter echoed in the surroundings. There was no sign of the Rabbit Clan which was gentle, peaceful,

and, above all, weak in combat. The bearmen screamed, desperately trying to fight back.

「Shit! What is this! Who the hell are you!?」「This can't be the Rabbit Clan!」

「Uwaa! Stay away! Stay away!」

They were ambushed by the enemies they were trying to ambush; the Rabbit Clan, laying in wait, showed unbelievable power, even amongst the Demi-human race. Arrows and stones flew accurately out of nowhere, and they utilized excellent teamwork. They joyously swung their blades while wearing maniacal expressions and laughing loudly. It all gave birth to a violent chaos. In this situation, they had surpassed even the Bear Clan.

In truth, the rabbit people would not be able to fight against the bearmen in one on one combat; however, in the past 10 days, the Haulia Family made up the difference with their hellish training.

Originally, the Rabbit Clan was weaker than all other Demi-humans. However, in order to survive and escape from battle, they had polished their stealth and danger perception. That was the only way they could survive.

As a result, they were able to promptly perceive an enemy presence and easily ambush them. It could be said they were a race with abilities suited to assassination. Still, their very nature crushed such advantages.

What Hajime's training did was awaken their combat instinct. He single-mindedly abused and cornered them by letting them swing weapons, cut enemies, and experience with their bodies how to evade, all without rest. By remembering the speaking mannerisms of a certain Sergeant Hartman, in 10 days of severe training, their minds had become completely combat oriented. Well, he did feel he had gone a little too far…

Having acquired the ability to aggressively attack without hesitation, they demonstrated promising combat prowess. Because they thought of the entire clan as members of their family, their level of teamwork was high from the very start. With their ability to skillfully hide their presence, their fighting abilities were tremendous.

Another reason the Haulia Family had such high combat potential was due to the weapons Hajime made, which increased their low attack power.

Each of them wielded two kodachi, produced in a precise and practiced manner such that their ultra-thin blades were able to split a blade of grass with just a touch. They were made of Taur Ore and were thus extremely durable. The Haulia Family also carried disposable throwing knives.

They also had powerful slingshots and crossbows made from a highly elastic thread gathered from spider demons in the Abyss. They were made for the children of the Haulia Family since close range combat was a little too much for them. Those very children were still able to shoot the enemy from beyond the fog using their searching capabilities.

Even Pal… Bullet Field of Extinction, was completely charmed as he

shot his crossbow like a sniper.

「A single shot until you die! Your head was blown away in the name of “Extinction!”」

Pal… Bullet Field of Extinction had recently gained the habit of saying such odd things. As an aside, he first had the habit of saying 「Aim and Shoot!」but was stopped by Hajime. He was unhappy then.

Regardless, the bearmen had fallen into a panic and were easily defeated without much resistance. Currently, half of them had been killed.

「Regin-dono! If this keeps up…」「Retreat!」

「I’ll take care of the re Gupe!?」「Tonto!?」

Having heard his subordinate advise they retreat, Regin hesitated due to his anger over Jin’s incapacitation and his fallen subordinates. This hesitation was not missed by the Haulia Family sniper. His subordinate, Tonto, tried to advise his leader to retreat once again; however, an arrow pierced his temple.

Regin and his subordinates were shaken and fell into disorder. Cam and the others thought this was a good chance and attacked all at once.

Arrows came flying from the fog, accurately aimed at their ankles. While distracted by these attacks, sharp blades came to reap their heads. There was one person who came from behind, wanting to kill the archer.

However, a presence appeared behind the assailant and delivered a fatal blow. The Haulia Family utilized their presence perception and teamwork to make fun of Regin and his subordinates. The bearmen shuddered. 「Are they really those worthless rabbits!?」they thought.

The battle dragged on for some time. Regin and his subordinates were finally able to recover from the confusion while covered in wounds, using their weapons to help them stand. By the time the waves of attacks, which used exquisite teamwork and cover fire, subsided, they were all panting. Regin and his subordinates were surrounded by Cam and the Haulia Family. They were cornered with their backs to a massive tree.

「What happened, "***?" Is that all you have!? Weak!」「I heard your clan was the strongest! To think you'd just be

"***!"」

「Raise your weapons! Are you "***" so weak kneed!?」With how much they were being verbally abused, they thought

for a moment the people before them may not have been from the Rabbit Clan. The bearmen trembled in fear and thought, 「What the hell happened to them!?」Some trembled while holding their

heads. A large hairy man said, 「Can you let us go?」with tears in his eyes… It was truly a surreal spectacle.

「Ku ku ku, anything else to say, strongest clan?」

Cam sarcastically insulted them with a truly evil expression. With their fighting spirit now awoken, they had thought about their circumstances and how much they were looked down upon in the past. Cam would never have been caught saying such things before.

「Nuguu…」

Hearing Cam, Regin's expression distorted in regret. He recovered from his confusion as reason returned to his eyes. Though they had been doused with cold water by the Haulia Family's strong assault, the anger from Jin's incapacitation still remained. Even so, he felt a sense of responsibility to bring his surviving subordinates back alive. He knew it was his fault they had fallen into such a predicament, since he was the one who incited their action.

「… Do what you want with me. Boil me, burn me, do whatever you like. However, I was the one who forced my subordinates to come. Please let them go.」

「Wh, Regin-dono!?」「Regin-dono! That's…」

Hearing his words, Regin's subordinates began to make a commotion. He was trying to save their lives with his own. Regin simply scolded them.

「Silence! This is my responsibility… I let blood go to my head and cloud my eyes. Rabbitman… no, Chief of the Haulia Family. I know

it is selfish of me, but I wish to save their lives! That's all.」

Regin released his weapon and began to kneel, his head bowed. Regin's subordinates knew of his great pride as a warrior, so they understood his resolution. They could not stay silent.

As for Cam's response…

「I refuse.」

He threw his knife. 「Uo!?」

Regin was barely able to dodge; however, starting with Cam's attack, Regin and his subordinates were attacked from all directions with arrows and stones fired at high velocity. Using their axes as shields, Regin and his subordinates desperately defended themselves. The Haulia Family could be heard laughing from the depths of their heart.

「Why!?」

Regin squeezed out this question.

「Why? Aren't you our enemies? Is there any other reason needed to kill you?」

Cam's answer was simple. 「Guu, but!」

「Above all… It's fun to crush and insult your arrogance! Ha ha ha!」

「Wh, wha!? Bastards! To people like you!」

As Cam said, the Haulia Family seemed to be enjoying themselves. They made fun of the bearmen by firing with slingshots and crossbows from a safe distance. They looked as if they were drunk on their power. Their hearts were already fine with killing people, whether those people were Demi-human or not. They had gone berserk.

Regin and his subordinates closed in together, trying to defend as the attacks increased in intensity… but they finally reached their limit. Though they avoided fatal attacks, they were covered in wounds. They would not be able to endure the next volley.

Cam, with a warped grin, raised his hand. The Haulia Family took aim. Regin, feeling this was not an appropriate place to die, gathered his strength, apologizing to his subordinates in his mind.

Like the God of Death's scythe that hunted for life, Cam's hand dropped. Arrows and stones were immediately shot. Regin did not look away, watching as if everything were in slow motion until…

「That's enough~!!!」

A white hammer blew everything away. 「Eh?」

Regin, who was dumbfounded by this spectacle, unwittingly called out. Right as he had accepted his death, a blue-gray haired, rabbit-eared girl with a large hammer fell from the sky. When the hammer struck the ground, the shock wave blew away all the arrows and stones. The bearmen could only stare blankly.

Shia was shaking in anger. Her sledgehammer, given the crater it created, was extremely heavy. She brandished it, however, as if it were weightless. She pointed it toward Cam.

「Ahh! Really! Father, everyone! Come to your senses!」

Seeing Shia, Cam and the others were stunned, but quickly came to hearing her scold them.

「Shia, I don't know why you did this, but please move away. We won't be able to kill them, you know?」

「I will not move! I won't allow any more of this!」

Cam and the others narrowed their eyes hearing Shia's words.
「Won't allow? Shia, don't tell me you want to bind yourself to

our enemy. Depending on your answer…」「No, I don't care if they die.」

「「「「Is that really okay!?」」」」

The bearmen thought she had come to stop her family, which led them to unintentionally scream out.

「Of course. If I took it easy against enemies who came at me with killing intent, I would not have been able to endure Yue-san's training. Even I'm not that naive.」

「Hmm, then why did you stop us?」

Cam asked her. The Haulia Family also looked perplexed.

「Isn't that obvious! Father, everyone! You'll all be broken at this rate! Don't fall any further!」

「Broken? Fallen?」

Cam and the others were all confused.

「That's right! Please remember! Hajime-san was merciless against his enemies; there was no need to talk, and he enjoyed killing both demons and people… but even if you were told to kill your enemies during training, it's not something you should enjoy!」

「W, well, it's not like we enjoy it…」

「What kind of face did you just make?」「Face? Well, even if you say that…」

Every one of the Haulia Family looked at one another. Shia let out a breath and clearly informed them.

「… You looked no different from the Empire soldiers that

attacked us.」

「!?」

It shocked them enough to blow away their frenzy. Their mood was turned down in an instant… They had been forced to confront the ugliness of their own actions. It was unbearable to be the same as those who stole away their family.

「Sh, Shia… I…」

「Fuu, it looks like you've calmed down. Thank goodness. I was afraid I would have to beat you all down.」

Shia swung her hammer around. With that pointed out, the Haulia Family began trembling in fright.

「Well, it was your first fight. If you realize it now, then that's fine! It was Hajime -san's fault, after all! I know having a strong fighting spirit is important, but this was too much! Rather, he just made you into berserkers!」

This time, Shia expressed her anger with Hajime. 「Just why did I fall for a person like that,」 she could be heard muttering.

At that time, a gunshot was heard.

「Guwa!?」 A groan could be heard from behind Shia along with the sound of someone collapsing. They had only just realized that there were people still present. When they looked back, they saw Regin writhing in pain.

「Why the hell are you trying to run away while they're distracted? You sit until they're done speaking.」

Hajime, accompanied by Yue, appeared from within the fog. Shia and the Haulia Family had been immersed in their talks, and Regin and his subordinates had tried to take that opportunity to run away. However, no one knew why he stuck with a non-lethal rubber bullet.

Though they heard Hajime's words, the bearmen vigilantly examined their surroundings, searching for a means to escape. Hajime simply silenced them with "Overpower." Hajime and Yue looked at Shia and the Haulia Family.

When Hajime saw Cam and the others, he felt awkward and looked away. However, immediately afterward, he apologized to them.

「Ah, well, how should I say this, sorry. Since I was fine with it myself, I forgot about the shock of murder. It was my mistake. Yeah, sorry.」

Everyone stared blankly at Hajime with open mouths. They had heard an unexpected and honest apology.

「B, Boss!? Are you okay!? Did you hit your head!?」

「Medic! Medic! We have a seriously wounded one over here!」
「Boss! Get a grip on yourself!」

His mouth twitched hearing these reactions.

Hajime truly thought he had made a mistake this time. Since he did not feel anything when he killed others, he did not consider the shock that should have come with the action. No matter how much stronger he had become, he did not have experience in teaching, and, as a result, he almost broke the Haulia Family mentally. He thought it was dangerous, which was why he apologized… but their reaction was doubting his sanity. 「Should I be angry?」 Hajime thought. While hesitating, he returned to his typical attitude.

Hajime put the matter aside and approached Regin, placing

Donner's muzzle to his forehead.

「Now then. Will you die bravely, or survive and live in shame?」
Hearing Hajime's words, the bearmen and the Haulia Family

looked at him in surprise. By his speech just now, they understood that he would overlook the bearmen depending on the situation. It was a serious proposal from Hajime who held no mercy against an enemy. Cam and the others looked at Hajime in sorrow, thinking, 「His head really must be…」 Though Hajime grew more angry, they would have no progress at this rate, so he let it go.

Regin looked at Hajime in surprise. This was the man who had completely changed the Haulia Family. He should have been completely merciless.

「… You're willing to let us go?」

「Yeah, you can return if you want to.」 「Your demands?」

He had easily said they could return. Aside from Regin, everyone was creating a commotion. From behind, Shia could be heard saying, 「If I hit his head now, maybe it will help…」 as she looked between her hammer and Hajime's head. Cam and the Haulia Family could be heard agreeing.

At this time, Hajime seriously thought about punishing them; however, he worked hard to let that slip by as well.

「Conditions, huh? When you reach Felbergan, say something to the elders.」

「…A message?」

Regin had been nervous about the demand, but he had simply been turned into a messenger. However, he froze when he heard the contents.

「“You owe me one.”」「…!? That’s!」

「So? What will you do? Will you accept this condition?」 Because Regin knew what Hajime meant, he unintentionally

shouted. Hajime simply waited for his decision.

The message meant the elders were indebted to him for allowing his attacker to live.

With one elder lost as well as the agonizing decision made at the Elders’ Conference not to interfere with Hajime, they would unconditionally be forced to accept Hajime’s request.

Looking at it objectively, with Jin’s situation and Regin’s actions in which he simply decided to take revenge, coupled with the fact that he was allowed to live, the prestige of the Elders’ Conference would surely take a hit. They were now outlaws for disregarding the elders, and there was no guarantee Hajime would not bare his fangs toward the Elders’ Conference one day.

In other words, for Regin and his men to survive meant they would return to their home country as a weakness. Even after ignoring the Elders' Conference, they returned with a debt on their shoulders. Furthermore, half their members were killed despite being of a clan which boasted of itself as the strongest… As Hajime had said, they would live in shame.

Hajime chose to further attack Regin.

「Remember this, your subordinates death was your own

responsibility, as well as your crushing defeat by the Haulia.」
「Guu.」

There was a reason Hajime gave this condition. Of course, it was not out of benevolence. It was because there were details of the Seven Great Labyrinths he still did not know; even if Felbergan was an isolated country, he might still have business with the country. There was a tradition inherited through the generations from the founder, after all. He wanted insurance for any small failures that might occur along the way.

While Regin was worrying, Hajime pressed the muzzle against his head harder.

「You have 5 seconds. Once that's over, I'll kill you one by one. "Quick judgment" is basic for a leader, isn't it?」

After that, Hajime slowly counted. Regin panicked, but nothing came to mind.

「I, I understand. I wish for us to return!」

「I see. Then go, quickly. Don't forget the message. If I discover you've tried to fool me…」

A strong killing intent emanated from Hajime's entire body. 「That day will mark the end of Felbergan.」

No matter who looked at him, he had the signs of a bad debt collector; rather, he was closer to a terrorist in this case. From behind, 「Thank goodness, it's the normal Hajime- san, 」 and 「Boss is back to normal!」 could be heard. He did not want to break the atmosphere he went to such efforts to make; however, he would definitely punish them later.

With their pride broken by the Haulia Family and hearing Regin desperately beg for his subordinates' lives, no one had the strength to protest, so they returned home. Perhaps because they were centered around the young, but they obediently accepted their defeat. Still, with this, Regin's influence in Felbergan would surely disappear. There was also the possibility of him being treated like a criminal. Even so, it was mild punishment, since he had tried to take another's life unjustly.

The bearmen disappeared into the fog.

After confirming that, Hajime turned to Shia and the Haulia. At first, they were unable to see his expression because he was looking down, but, suddenly, the atmosphere became odd.

Cam and the others felt terrible for falling into a frenzy, and they now wanted to speak to Hajime about many things, completely oblivious to the atmosphere. Only Shia was drenched in a cold sweat.

Hajime looked up. There was a large smile on his face, but he clearly was unhappy. Cam timidly spoke up, noticing Hajime's appearance.

「B, Boss?」

「Yeah, isn't this serious? I thought this was my fault this time. To think you would reach this standard so quickly, I should have thought of some kind of a brake for you.」

「N, no, even if you say that… it was because of our own immaturity…」

「No, no, it's fine, you know? I admit it, it's my fault. That's why I thought I would apologize honestly… but that was quite a reaction you had, wasn't it? Well, I guess I can understand that, seeing what my usual attitude is like… Even so, even so…

this out of place feeling I have, I really need to let it go… You know what that means, right?」

「N, no, we're a bit…」

By now, even Cam was thinking, 「Ah, this is bad. He's angry now,」 as cold sweat poured down his back. He retreated, step by step. Perhaps remembering their training, many began crying in place.

「Now's my chance!」Shia thought as she turned to try to escape. She did not forget to make the nearby people into her shields. However…

Dopan!!

One bullet passed between that man's legs, hit the ground, and ricocheted off a tree root to hit Shia in the butt.

「Hakyun!」

He had used his pointlessly accurate gun skill to hit Shia in the butt. He had practiced angled shots relentlessly until he could do this. Because of the impact, Shia screamed and jumped up, only to collapse to the floor with her rear in the air. She twitched in pain.

Seeing Shia convulsing and Hajime's gun skill, Cam and the rest trembled in fear. The man whose legs the bullet passed through covered his crotch with both hands, tears in his eyes. He pat himself, having felt the shock wave as the bullet passed through his legs.

Without doing anything else, Hajime placed Donner back in its holster. Finally, he cried out angrily once.

「For now, I will hit everyone once!」

— Waaaa—!!

All members of the Haulia Family scattered about, trying to escape.

For a while, screams and an angry roar could be heard in the surroundings.

The only one who remained in place was Shia, smoke billowing from her butt.

「…When will we go to the Great Tree?」

Only Yue, who was not involved in any way, could be heard muttering.

For several hours, Hajime unjustly punished the Haulia until he was satisfied. They left fighting to Cam, while other members of the Haulia Family scattered into the surroundings, looking for enemies as part of their training. Because being unprepared was the greatest enemy, a fact carved into their flesh, everyone was serious. Most of all, the fresh bruises on their bodies showed they had no other option.

「Uu～ It still tingles～」

Shia whined while rubbing her butt. She looked at Hajime resentfully.

「Stop looking at me like that, it's annoying.」

「That's too much. It's not common sense to shoot a girl in the butt! And you even used that pointlessly high skill—」

「I could say the same to you. You seriously thought about hitting

my head and used someone else as a shield to run away…

that's not something a normal person would do.」

A man from the Haulia Family nodded his head. 「Uu, it's all because of Yue-san's education…」 「… I raised Shia.」

「… Can't comment on that.」

Yue looked at Hajime while boasting with a face that said 「Praise me!」 Hajime averted his gaze.

After they advanced for another 15 minutes, they finally arrived at the Great Tree.

Hajime's first impression was, 「… The hell's with this?」

He was half surprised and half in doubt. Yue, too, wore an expression of someone whose expectations had crumbled. The two imagined a tree much bigger in scale than those in Felbergan.

However, the Great Tree was… splendidly withered.

Its size was not far off from their imagination. Its diameter alone approached 50 meters. Its size was obviously abnormal compared to the surroundings.

And though everything around it was fresh and green, only the Great Tree was withered.

「The Great Tree was withered even before the founding of Felbergan; however, it has never rotted. It remains unchanged. With the thickness of the fog here and the fact that it never rots, this place became sacred to us. Well, you could also think of it as a tourist spot…」

Cam gave an explanation to Hajime and Yue who had inquiring faces. While hearing this, Hajime looked about the roots. Just as Alfrick had said, there was a lithograph built there.

「This is… just like Orcus's door…」 「… Mm, same crest.」

On the lithograph were seven squares with a crest engraved on each one; it was exactly the same as the one in Orcus's room.

To prove it, Hajime took out Orcus's ring. The pattern on the ring was the same as one on the lithograph.

「So it's the entrance to the True Great Labyrinth after all… but…

what should we do about this?」

Hajime approached the Great Tree and started hitting it; when he asked Cam and the others if they knew anything, they had nothing more to offer. Though he had heard of the traditions from Alfrick, there was nothing concerning the entrance. Hajime thought about the possibility of going back and collecting his debt already.

At that time, Yue, who was looking at the lithograph, spoke.

「Hajime… Look.」

「Hm? Something there?」

What Yue noticed was on the other side of the lithograph. There were empty slots that corresponded with the seven crests.

「This is…」

Hajime put Orcus's ring into the corresponding slot. Then… the lithograph faintly shined.

Wondering what happened, everyone from the Haulia Family who were on the lookout gathered. For a while, they looked at the shining lithograph as the light faded. They noticed characters appearing there. Something was written.

- Four Proofs.
- Power of Reproduction.

- A Symbol of Woven Bonds.
- The path to a new trial will open to he who has all.

「… What does this mean?」

「… Four Proofs… maybe other Labyrinths' proofs?」

「… Then what about power of reproduction and symbol of woven bonds?」

Shia responded to Hajime as he puzzled over it.

「Hmm～ symbol of woven bonds, isn't it that? Whether or not you got a demi-human to guide you here or not? Only Demi-humans can easily move around the Sea of Trees, and to have a demi-human guide you is an exception amongst exceptions.」

「…I see. So it's something like that.」 「… Next is reproduction… me?」

Yue pointed at herself who owned the Unique Skill, "Automatic Regeneration." She cut her blood to activate the skill and touched the Great Tree… but there was no change.

「Muu… I was wrong.」

「… Hmm～ A withered tree… power of reproduction… and four proofs… It's possible we need to conquer more than half the Seven Great Labyrinths, and amongst them, there might be a magic from the Age of Gods concerning rebirth, maybe it's something like that?」

Hajime wondered whether they needed to use Age of the Gods Magic to restore the withered tree. Yue seemed to consent.

「Haa～ Damn, so it's still impossible to enter now… It was so troublesome, but there's nothing else we can do, I guess…」

「Mm…」

Hajime could only clench his teeth having come this far. Yue also had some regret; however, because they could not enter the Great Labyrinth now, even if they were worried about it, they could do nothing for now. They switched their target to obtaining three more proofs for now.

Hajime then gathered the Haulia Family.

「You've heard it before, but we're aiming to conquer the other Great Labyrinths now. The promise you kept to guide us to the Great Tree is over now. Right now, even without the protection of Felbergan, you'll be able to survive within the Sea of Trees. This is good bye.」

He then looked at Shia. He was asking if she had any words to leave behind; Shia understood now was the time to voice her thoughts. Even if she would be back, conquering three of the Great Labyrinths would take time. She would not be able to meet her family during that interim.

Shia nodded and took a step forward to talk to Cam and her family.

「Fath—」

「Boss! I have something to say!」

「… huh, Father? It's my turn to speak now…」

Ignoring Shia, Cam took a step forward and stood at attention.
「Father? Wait, Father?」Shia could be heard saying those words as Cam interrupted. Like a British guard, Cam simply stood upright and looked a head.

「Ah～ What is it?」

For the time being, they ignored Shia. Cam began speaking for the Haulia Family.

「Boss, please take us along!」

「Eh! Everyone wants to go with Hajime-san as well!?」

Shia was surprised by Cam's words. In their discussion 10 days ago, they had the mood of sending her off. What happened to that, she thought.

「We are the Haulia, but we are also not the Haulia! We are your subordinates! By all means, take us along! This is the will of our family!」

「Hold on, Father! I never heard about this! Rather, why did I have to go through so much hardship…」

「I admit, we are jealous of Shia!」

「He admitted it! He really said it! Really, what happened in these past 10 days!」

Cam had spoken concisely, completely ignoring Shia. Hajime gave a frank response.

「I refuse.」

「Why!?」

Cam asked why Hajime responded so quickly. The other Haulia also approached Hajime in their impatience.

「Because you'd be hindrances.」「But!」

「Don't get caught up in the moment. It should take 180 days at the fastest!

「What's with that frighteningly realistic number!?」

Cam and the other rabbit people hung onto him, bothering him after his quick rejection.

His General Hartmann training gave them a sense of trust and awe which made them think「Even if he won't let us, we'll follow!」As it were, they would follow him to town, and so it would become a riot, so Hajime set his conditions reluctantly.

「It's that, right. Stay here and keep training. The next time I come to the Sea of Trees, if I can use you, then I will.」

「… Are there any lies in your words?」「None.」

「If you're lying, we'll keep calling Boss' name in the Human cities as if we're creating a new religion, got it?」

「Y, you've got quite a bad sense…」

「That's because we have pride as your subordinates.」

What a bold subordinate, Hajime thought as his cheeks twitched. Yue patted Hajime's arm in comfort.

This was a consequence of his own deeds, so Hajime sighed while looking at the sky, thinking about how troublesome his next visit to the Sea of Trees would be.

「Gusu, no one is even looking at me… even though I'm leaving…」

Shia, who was thrown to the side, was writing on the ground as no one minded her, as expected.

Shia smiled as the wind ran through her rabbit ears, and she asked a question over Hajime's shoulder, her eyes knit in pleasure.

「Hajime-san, now that I realize it, I haven't heard yet, where is our next destination?」

「Ah? I never said anything?」 「I never heard, at least.」

「… I already knew.」

Shia let loose a groan of protest to the elated Yue.

「I, I'm your companion now, so please tell me things like that! Communication is important!」

「Sorry. We're going to Raisen Gorge next.」「Raisen Gorge?」

Shia had a questioning expression. Currently, the locations of the Seven Great Labyrinths, excluding 【Hartsenna Sea of Trees,】 that had been confirmed were 【Guryuen Volcano】and

【Schune Snowfields.】Because their locations were known, they would be the ideal location. Guessing what she thought, Hajime voiced his intent.

「For now, we'll head east to west through Raisen and look for the Seven Great Labyrinths. The 【Volcano】is to the west, and we might as well look for another on the way, got it?」

「C, crossing through Raisen Gorge…」

Shia's cheeks twitched. Raisen Gorge was popular as an execution ground, and, recently, it was the place where her family was almost annihilated. To think of that place as a highway shook her mind.

Hajime, knowing Shia was shaken with how tightly she held him, revealed an amazed expression.

「You know, you should believe in your own power a bit. For how you are now, the demons in the canyon are no different from demons in the Sea of Trees. We can't use magic inside Raisen, didn't you know? Since you specialize in body strengthening, you can move around without any hindrances. Rather, it's the best stage for you.」

「… I'm ashamed as your master.」 「Uu～ I'm ashamed, too～」

Yue looked at Shia in amazement. Shia tried to change the topic.
「Th, then, are we going to camp today? Or are we going to a

nearby town?」

「If possible, I'd like to get some spices for food, and it would be good to get materials as well. Based on the map I saw before, there should be a town on the way there.」

As an extra measure, Hajime wanted to eat real food. Also, in the future, he would need money to buy things in town. He wanted to exchange materials he had for money before it rotted.

Also, he wanted to try to settle into a place before setting off to Raisen Gorge.

「Haa～ Is that so… thank goodness.」

Hearing Hajime's words, Shia felt relieved. He was dumbfounded by her reaction and asked her about it.

「Well～ From your story, I thought you'd be satisfied eating demon flesh from Raisen Gorge… and Yue-san only needs your blood, so she won't have any problems… I was wondering how I should persuade you for my personal food～ I'm glad it was my imagination. So even you eat normal food!」

「Of course… Who the hell would like to eat demons! What do you think I am…」

「A new predatory demon?」

「*OK*, I'll be tying you up until we reach town.」

「Wai, stop, where did you pull that out from! That collar! Stop～ Don't put it on me～ Yue-san, don't look, help!」

「… You reap what you sow.」

In a sense, the three had a good relationship as they advanced. After driving for several hours, the day finally grew dark, and the

town came into view. For the first time since he escaped from the Abyss, he got the feeling of 「I'm back!」 Yue also looked somewhat excited. She turned her face and their eyes met, smiles appearing on their faces.

「Umm～ I know it's a good atmosphere, but can you please take

this collar off? I can't remove it for some reason… umm, did you hear me? Hajime-san? Yue-san? Please don't ignore me~ I'm going to cry! It's so depressing!」

Hajime and Yue simply responded with their smiles. The two were in their own world. Even with the sobbing coming from right behind them, they were not be shaken.

After some more time, the city gradually grew clearer, and the two returned from their own world.

Looking forward, there was a small town enclosed in a moat and fence. There was a wooden gate where the road was, and a small hut by the side. It was probably a guard post. Even if it was small scale, it was still large enough to require a guard. Hajime's face loosened as he thought about being able to do some shopping.

「… If you're in such a good mood, can you take this collar off already?」

Shia, with a disappointed expression, earnestly asked Hajime who was smiling as he looked to the town. Fixed on Shia's neck was a black collar embedded with a small, inconspicuous crystal. It was something sturdy that Hajime was using as punishment for Shia's verbal slip. For some reason, she could not take it off, so Shia asked to have it removed, only to have her words pass through his ears.

Slowly, they began to clearly see the town, so he placed Stiefe into "Treasure Warehouse" and started walking on foot. It would likely cause a commotion if he arrived in a jet black bike.

Along the way, Shia continued complaining. As expected, he completely ignored everything. They eventually arrived at the town gate. Like he thought, the hut was a guard post. An armed man came out of it, equipped with leather armor and a long sword at his waist. Rather than a soldier, he seemed closer to an adventurer. He called them to a stop.

「Please wait. Show your Status Plate. Also, what is your objective in coming here?」

It was likely a regulation of some sort, since he looked unmotivated. Hajime pulled out his Status Plate while answering the guard's questions.

「We're here to secure rations. We'll be heading out on a journey soon.」

The man responded indifferently as he checked Hajime's Status Plate. He blinked his eyes, held the plate further, then rubbed his eyes again. Having seen the guard like this, Hajime had a cold sweat. 「Not good, I forgot to hide that.」

There was a function to hide stats and skills on the Status Plate. Even for adventurers and mercenaries, revealing abilities could prove fatal. Hajime immediately tried to deceive the guard by lying.

「I was attacked by demons a while ago. It may have broken then.」

「It, it broke? That's, well…」

The guard was perplexed. After all, Hajime's Status Plate did not display his level, and his stats as well as his skills were all over the place. Though the man had heard of people losing their Status Plate, for it to be broken (or bugged) was something completely unheard of. He would normally just laugh it off, but what was visible was unbelievable, so he did not know how to take it.

To further his attack, Hajime shrugged his shoulders as if he was completely bothered by it.

「Isn't it too strange if it wasn't broken? It's like I'm a monster. Do I look like someone who could destroy this town with the tip of my finger?」

When Hajime spread his arms in a joking gesture, the guard smiled wryly. If what the Status Plate was true, then the man before him truly was a monster that could surpass heroes and demon kings. Even without hearing that, he had already considered the plate to be broken.

If the man truly knew how much of a monster Hajime was, then he would have fainted. Hajime boldly told a lie and looked back at Shia and Yue who had amazed expressions.

「Ha ha, couldn't possibly see that. Though I've never heard of this thing being bugged, there's a first for everything… and those two…」

The man turned his gaze to Yue and Shia, asking to see their Status Plate, and when he looked to confirm the identity of the two… he was stunned.

His face was dyed red as he looked between Yue and Shia with an unfocused expression. To say nothing of Yue who was a beautiful girl who could easily be mistaken for a pristine doll, Shia was clearly also a beauty with a mystical atmosphere. The guard looked at the two in admiration.

Hajime unnaturally cleared his throat. The guard looked back at him in a panic.

「While we were attacked by the demons, this girl lost her plate. As for this rabbit… you understand, right?」

The guard nodded in consent and returned Hajime's Status Plate.
「Still, how'd you get your hands on such a beauty? Aren't gray-haired rabbit people rare? Are you rich or something?」

The guard asked Hajime in envy as he continued peeking at the two. Hajime simply shrugged his shoulders.

「Well, no matter. You may pass.」

「Ah, thanks. Oh, one sec. Where can I sell raw materials?」「Hm? Just go straight down the main road to the Adventurer

Guild. If you want to bring it to a store, ask them. They'll give you a basic map of the town.」

「Ohh, you've been really kind. Thanks.」

After receiving information from the guard, Hajime and the two girls passed through the gate.

They entered the town of 【Brook,】given what was written on the gate. The town had a lively atmosphere. Though it was not quite at the level of 【Horuad】which was at the outskirts of Orcus, there were many stalls lined up, and people could be heard haggling.

This liveliness only served to uplift his feelings. It was not just Hajime but Yue who was looking happy as well; Shia had been trembling for a while now, staring at Hajime with tear-filled eyes. Regardless, she was anxious, so he let out a sigh. 「You're interrupting my good mood,」Hajime complained in his mind while glancing at Shia.

「What is it? We're finally in a town, and now you're looking just like that gorilla demon who desperately tried to hold up a boulder that had suddenly fallen on it from above.」

「Who's a gorilla! Rather, how do you even know what that looks like! You would have blown it away in one move! It's pitiful just imagining it!」

「… Don't say such cold things with tears in your eyes.」

「Was that a follow up attack!? That's too mean! Uuu～ That's not important!」

Shia was busily responding in anger. She tried to tell him, 「I'm unhappy!」as her entire body flailed. As an aside, the story of the gorilla demon was a time when he was experimenting and polishing his abilities on compressing materials. He, by no means, enjoyed bullying. Also, Yue was happily poking the creature at the time. It was the demon he happened to get the unique magic, "Strong Arm" from.

「This! This collar! They think I'm a slave! Hajime-san, if you understand that, then please remove it! Uu～ This is so mean～ Aren't we companions～?」

That was the true reason Shia was angry. Though they were companions, she was shocked to have been treated as a slave. Naturally, the collar Hajime put on her was not a slave collar, nor did it have the power to restrain her. Shia understood this, but still, a shock was a shock.

Seeing Shia like this, Hajime scratched his head and looked at her.
「A free demi-human, furthermore, a popular and highly-

demanded rabbit girl, wouldn't be able to walk freely inside town, right? And a blue-haired one like you would attract attention with your figure and style. If you declared you weren't someone's slave, you'd instantly be marked. There'd be a bunch of kidnappers after us, too. It'd be too troubleso…

why are you so giddy?」

Hajime suddenly glared at Shia who was embarrassed, her cheeks

blushing. Yue looked coldly at Shia.

「H, honestly, Hajime -san! To say something like that in front of everyone! To say I have an outstanding figure and style, and that I'm the cutest in the world and so charming, really! That's so embarras buga!?」

Yue's Golden Right Straight found its way into Shia's cheeks as she was lost in the moment. With love-filled thoughts, Shia screamed and collapsed. She had received the blow without defending with her body strengthening; she got up while rubbing her cheek, now red for a different reason.

「… Don't get carried away.」「… Sowwy, Yue-san.」

Hearing Yue's cold words, Shia's body trembled. While amazed by their appearance, Hajime continued his explanation.

「Ah～ In conclusion, within Human territory, I'm calling you a slave for protection. If I don't do this, there'll be too many problems, and it will be all your fault.」

「That's… Though I understand…」

She understood the reasoning, but Shia was still unhappy; it was hard to accept in the end. She strongly wanted to be called their companion, so she could not simply accept th is. This time, it was Yue who spoke to Shia.

「… Don’t worry about the small fry.」「Yue-san?」

「… What’s most important are those important to you… right?」
「… Th, that’s right. Right!」

「… Mm, though it can’t be helped… Shia is a companion… don’t mind the small details.」

「… Yue-san… E he he, thank you!」

She was the Vampire Princess who wielded her power for the masses. Though she was betrayed, she found that small words could carry such a heavy weight. That was why she was able to break the stone within Shia’s heart. Everyone of the Haulia Family, and even Hajime and Yue, understood Shia was important to the two of them. It was unnecessary to draw in unnecessary troubles. Of course, even if they did, it would be no problem surpassing them…

Hearing Yue’s words, Shia smiled shyly while looking at Hajime, expecting him to say something.

Hajime sighed reluctantly and began spinning his words.

「Well, I won’t abandon you if you’re attacked because people found out you aren’t a slave.」

「Even if everyone in this town become your enemy?」

「You should know the answer from what I did to the Empire’s soldiers, right?」

「So you'd even do it if your enemy was a country! Fu fu!」

「What was that? Whether it is the world or the gods, nothing will change. No matter who the enemy, I will fight.」

「Ku fu fu, did you hear that, Yue-san? Did you hear what Hajime-san just said? We're important, right?」

「… Only I am important to Hajime.」

「Wai, please, read the mood! At this time, you should just say 『… Mm』 Ah, that was too fast!」

Despite her complaints, Shia was happily enjoying herself. Hearing he would fight even the world was, as expected, something that would make a woman happy, especially since the person who said it was the one she loved.

Hajime glared at the two playing (or so it looked to him) and began to give an explanation of Shia's collar.

「One more thing. The collar was made with Telepathy Stone and Perception Ore. If you need to use it, then use it. You just need to put magic into it.」

「Telepathy Stone and Perception Stone?」

The Telepathy Stone was simply a mineral which could transfer thoughts. It was something Hajime had made with Creation Magic

that gave the user the “Telepathy” skill, and the amount of magic used was proportional to the distance the message was sent. Furthermore, in this age, there was nothing like a telephone or telepathy, so everyone within the range of thought would be able to hear the conversation so long as they had this ore.

The Perception Stone was also created using Creation Magic which gave the bearer “Physical Perception [＋Focused Perception].” With Focused Perception activated, it was able to identify a specific presence amongst a crowd. This took the role of acting as a beacon. Again, the strength of the beacon was proportional to the amount of magic used.

Having heard Hajime’s explanation, Shia raised a voice of praise.
「Anyway, that collar can be removed just by putting a certain amount of magic into it, you know?」

「I see～ in other words… you wanted to always be able to hear my voice and know where I was, so you made this? Really, do you like me that much? Still, it’s a little too, ahh, but it’s not like I hate Baberu!?」

「… Don’t get carried away.」「Gusu, Sorry.」

With a beautiful, picturesque arc, Yue’s kick came flying at the back of Shia’s head who collapsed after screaming in a strange way. Yue spoke with a cold voice. Though she was weak at close combat… she was able to deliver a splendid high kick. Shia apologized with tears in her eyes. Even if she recognized Shia as a companion on their journey, Yue would not forgive Shia for approaching Hajime. In truth, however, it was questionable whether Shia’s behavior and

speech was truly an approach.

With such a happy (?) mood, they continued walking down the main street until they discovered a signboard with a large sword drawn on it. It was the same as the one on Horuad's Adventurer Guild sign, though it was significantly smaller.

After checking the signboard again, Hajime stepped inside the open door.

Because guilds had the image of a place where rough people gather, Hajime thought it would be a dirty place, but it was unexpectedly clean. There was a counter in front of the entrance and a restaurant to the left. There were some people who seemed to be adventurers, eating and chatting to one another. Judging from how no one had any alcohol, they likely did not serve it. Those who wanted a drink needed to go to a bar.

Naturally, when Hajime and the girls entered the guild, the adventurers looked their way. At first, they were simply three unknown people; however, when they saw Yue and Shia, they grew more curious. Some called out in admiration while others stared blankly, just like the guard. There were others hit by their girlfriends. It was just like an adventurer not to stop a slap.

Though there were some people who thought to approach them, most logically held back and simply observed. Hajime went to the counter, seeing no reason to simply stand there.

At the counter was a charming, smiling… old woman. Her build was good, and she looked to be about twice as wide as Yue. The beautiful woman receptionist was but a fantasy, very much like

how professional maids were often old women. No matter what the world, reality was harsh.

As an aside, Hajime harbored no expectations of seeing a beautiful woman as a receptionist. Even so, it would be a lie to say he was not hopeful in some way. Hajime had been wanting to stop Yue and Shia from glaring icily at him as they had been for some time.

Perhaps because she knew what was going on in the mind of the three, the old woman received them with a charming smile.

「You have a flower in both hands, and you still want more? Sorry I'm not that beautiful.」

She did not use any specific mind-reading magic, but it was clear to see on her face. Hajime, his cheeks twitching, somehow responded.

「No, I never thought that.」

「A ha ha ha ha, are you underestimating a woman's intuition? I know how simple a man is. Don't look away, it'll only make you harder to believe.」

「… I'm deeply impressed.」

「To suddenly giving me a sermon on our first meeting when I'm this old, can you give me a break?」 Hajime responded with an unapologetic expression. It was not like he hated her, though. The adventurers who were eating nearby looked at Hajime and thought, 「Ah～ She's also scolding him～」 It seems the adventurers here were kept in place by this old woman.

「Well then, welcome to the Adventurer Guild Branch in Brook. What's your business?」

「I'd like to know where I can sell raw materials.」

「Selling raw materials, huh? Can you show me your Status Plate first?」

「Hm? Is it necessary to show my Status Plate to purchase something?」

「Oh?」the old woman could be heard saying.

「You're an adventurer, right? Your Status Plate isn't necessary to purchase anything, but if you're confirmed to be an adventurer, you'll receive 10% more on anything you sell.」

「I see.」

As the woman said, there were various privileges Adventurers had. They were the ones who collected the raw materials such as magic cores and recovery medicines necessary for daily life. Also, it was unknown when the town would be attacked by demons, so it was rare for anyone else to gather raw materials. It was natural to give rewards corresponding to the danger.

「You can get a 10 to 20% discount at hotels and shops associated with the guild as well, and you can freely use carriages at higher ranks. So, what will you do? The fee to register is 1000 Ruta.」

The Ruta was the northern continent's common currency. Zagaruta Ore was a special mineral used to make this currency, and it was mixed with other minerals to form currency of different colors. A seal would be carved into each coin as well. Blue, red, yellow, purple, green, white, black, silver, and gold were the colors used to represent 1, 5, 10, 50, 100, 500, 1000, 5000, and 10000 Ruta respectively. The Ruta's value was no different from Japan's Yen.

「Hm～ I see. Even though you explained all that, I can't register now. Sorry, I don't have any money at all. Is it possible for me to sell some goods first? The original value will be good as is.」

「Don't say that in front of these two cute girls. I'll help. It's not like it's a big inconvenience, you know?」

The old woman was cool. Hajime decided to accept her good will and showed his Status Plate.

This time, he made sure to conceal most of it, displaying only his name, age, gender, and job. Though the woman asked for Yue and Shia's Plates, she was cut short. Though they did not have plates to begin with, he could have asked for them to be made. Even so, their stats and skills would be seen by the old woman then.

Though Hajime wanted to see the stats as well, he thought the unique magic would be clear to see on the plate. If the three of them had their existences publicized, it would be troublesome, so they decided to put it on hold.

New information was written on the Status Plate that was handed

back to him. Alongside the job column was an occupation column marked with “Adventurer” as well as a blue mark.

The blue mark represented his rank. It would then later proceed to red, yellow, purple, green, white, black, silver, and gold…

the same as currency. In other words, Blue adventurers were “no different from 1 Ruta.” It was quite painful. Surely the guild masters who thought of this system before were slightly twisted.

As an aside, the limit for a noncombat class was Black. Since the number of Black adventurers did not even make the four digit mark, it was worthy of applause to make it that far. Someone who reached Gold was an object of admiration.

「If you’re a man, then work hard to reach Black, got it? Don’t show any uncool sides to these girls.」

「Yeah, I’ll do that. Is it okay to sell these now?」

「No problem. I have the qualifications to appraise things, so show them to me.」

Apparently the old woman was not just a receptionist but also an appraiser. She was quite excellent.

Hajime took out the raw materials from “Treasure Warehouse” and placed it in a bag beforehand; the items included demon furs, nails,

fangs, and magic cores. When he placed the bag on the counter, the old woman was astonished.

「Th, these are!」

She timidly took them and checked the items thoroughly. After holding her breath in nervousness, the old woman finally looked up and sighed.

「You've brought something unexpected. Aren't these… from demons in the Sea of Trees?」

「Yeah, that's right.」

Hajime did not want any problems in the future, so the raw materials from the Abyss could not be taken out here. If he had taken out unknown materials, it would cause a large commotion. Though he was hesitant to take out materials from the Sea of Trees, since they were also unusual, he had nothing else to go with. Seeing the woman's reaction, he knew it was unusual after all.

If he took out raw materials from the Abyss, it could very well become a situation where the guild master appeared and suddenly raised his rank as the receptionist looked at him in admiration… so it was good he did not do that. For that reason, Hajime wanted Yue and Shia to stop looking at him coldly, since it made his body tremble.

「… You're an unexpected one.」

The old woman glanced at him in amazement. 「I don't understand what you mean.」

Though he had changed, his otaku soul could not be erased… or something along those lines. Hajime pretended not to know and looked away from reality.

「There are quite a lot of quality materials from the Sea of Trees. Thanks for selling them.」

Even though the old woman did not know the truth, she continued speaking. She was capable of reading the mood; she truly was excellent.

「Are these unusual after all?」

「You know, a human's sense of direction is driven wild inside the Sea of Trees, and you can only get lost there once since there will never be a second time. It's a risky area, so no one goes there. Though it's possible to buy Demi-human slaves to enter, it's more profitable to sell them. They sell at high prices and make you well known.」

She took a peek at Shia. She probably thought they received Shia's help to go around the Sea of Trees. Thanks to Shia, she was not suspicious of how they came upon the raw materials from the Sea of Trees. Rather, she looked at them anxiously and said 「You're young, so don't do anything unreasonable.」

But if he had mentioned that he had entered the country of Demi-humans, 【Felbergan,】 Hajime wondered w hat her expression would be like. He smiled bitterly in his mind thinking this.

After the old woman assessed everything, she presented the money. He received 487000 Ruta for everything; it was quite an excellent

amount.

「Is this much okay? I think it will sell for more at central.」「I don't mind this much.」

Hajime received fifty-one pieces of the Ruta currency. Perhaps because it was made with ore, it was strangely light, so it was hardly bothersome to carry more than 50 pieces. Regardless, if it became a bother, he could just store it in "Treasure Warehouse."

「By the way, I heard from the guard I could get a simple map of the town.」

「Ahh, please wait a moment… here, here it is. Please use it; there are recommended inns and stores marked on it.」

On the map he was given, there was a lot of useful information and descriptions that were simply written which made it a great item. He felt it unbelievable that something of this level was free of charge.

「Hey, is this really okay? A great map like this, free of charge? I thought I'd need some money for something of this level…」

「I don't mind, it's just a bit of a hobby for me. Compared to those who have to actually create the map, what I do is just scribble on it.」

The woman truly was an excellent person. Exactly why did she become a receptionist? There was surely some amount of drama behind it.

「I see. Well, that helps.」

「Well said. Also, because you have money, please stay here for some time. Though the town's public order isn't bad, there might be a number of reckless men out there after these two.」

To the very end, the woman had taken care of them. She truly was a good person. Hajime grinned and said, 「I'll do that.」 He turned to the entrance and was followed closely by Yue and Shia. Some adventurers in the restaurant whispered to each other, their eyes glued to Yue and Shia to the end.

「Hmm, they're interesting people, in a number of ways…」 The old woman happily muttered to herself behind their backs.

Hajime and the girls followed the map, though it was closer to a guidebook, and decided on an Inn called "Masaka Inn." According to the descriptions, it served delicious food and had good security, and it had a good bath, too. The last part was what settled things. Though it was pricey, there were no problems since they had the money for it. Even so, they had a feeling what would follow them there was precisely that "Impossible…"

On the inn's first floor, there was a dining room filled with people having their meal. When Hajime entered, all gazes were focused on Yue and Shia as expected. Ignoring that, the three approached the

counter. A girl around 15 cheerfully greeted them.

「Welcome～ welcome to “Masaka Inn!” Are you looking for lodgings today? Or perhaps something to eat?」

「Lodgings. Though I’ve seen it in this guide book, is this place as good as described?」

The girl nodded when Hajime showed her the special map. 「Ah, an introduction from Catherine-san. Yes, it’s precisely as

written. How many nights do you wish to stay?」

Though the girl tried promptly to continue with the process of registering them for their stay, Hajime was stuck thinking of something else. Hajime was shocked to hear the old woman’s name was Catherine. The girl simply called out to him.

「Ah, ahh, sorry. Just 1 night. Meals and a bath.」

「Okay. The bath is 100 Ruta every 15 minutes It’s empty right now.」

The girl showed him the time table. Because he wanted to enjoy himself, he booked both the men and womens’ bath for 2 hours. 「Eh, 2 hours!?」 the girl was surprised. It could not be helped. Hajime was Japanese, after all.

「Umm～ What about the rooms? There are double and triple rooms…」

The girl looked at them curiously. She was an adolescent, after all; however, Hajime could feel the other customers perk their ears up. Though he knew Yue and Shia were beautiful, it seemed they stood out more than he expected. Since they knew no one, Hajime was slightly paralyzed.

「Ah, a triple room, please.」

Hajime said that without hesitation. Their surroundings became noisy, and the girls blushed. However, there was one person who objected to Hajime's words.

「… No good. Two double rooms.」

It was Yue. The surrounding customers, especially the men, looked at Hajime with expressions that said, 「Serves you right!」 They thought Yue's words were intended for he and the two to sleep in separate rooms; however, Yue's next words drove them further into despair.

「… One for Hajime and me. Shia in the other.」

「W, what's with that!! I don't want to be left out! The triple room is better, you know!」

Shia fiercely protested. Yue said only one thing. 「… It will be distracting if Shia is there.」

「Distracting… what do you mean?」 「… That is… that?」

「Buu!? Wha, don't say that here! That's vulgar!」

The men, falling into despair, heard Yue's words and glared at Hajime in envy. The girl at the counter turned red as she looked between Hajime and Yue. Hajime tried to put a stop to it, but he was too slow.

「Th, then, Yue-san, please stay in the other room! Hajime-san and I will stay in the same room!」

「… Hmm, then?」

Yue's cold, piercing gaze turned to Shia who was now pointing at her. Because of its power, Shia, remembering her training, trembled. She gathered her courage and loudly proclaimed,

「Th, then I'll give my virginity to Hajime-san!」

Silence. No one could say a word. Everyone was fully focused on Hajime and the girls. The girls' parents back in the kitchen could be heard saying 「My, my,」 and 「It's nice to be young.」

Yue swayed, her eyes sending off an absolute zero gaze. 「… Today marks the anniversary of your death.」

「Uu, I, I won't lose! I'll defeat you and become the main heroine from now on!」

「… I will show you that the master is stronger than the disciple.」
「I'll be taking that position!」

An abnormal pressure gushed from Yue and Shia who was currently trembling while shouldering her hammer. It was truly pandemonium. Everyone swallowed their saliva, nervous in this critical atmosphere. Then…

Gochin! Gochin! 「Hyu!?」

「Hakyu!?」

The sound of fists hitting the girls was followed by their screams. Yue and Shia, with tears in their eyes, crouched down while covering their heads with both hands. Of course, it was Hajime who hit the two.

「Honestly, troubling everyone, and, above all, embarrassing me.」

「… Uu, Hajime's love hurts…」

「J, just a bit longer, just a bit longer… with my body strengthening, the pain will…」

「You reap what you sow, idiots.」

Hajime gazed at the two coldly then returned to face the girl at the counter. The girl corrected her posture.

「I'm sorry for the commotion. A triple room, please.」

「… T, triple room in this situation… In, in other words, three people? A, amazing… hah! Don't tell me, the reason you booked the bath for 2 hours was also for that!? Washing each others' bodies!

Then… d, doing this and that… how dirty!」

The girl's mind had already gone for a trip.

The landlady, unable to stand it any longer, dragged the girl inside, and the girl's father finished the procedure. 「Sorry about my girl,」 he apologized as he handed them the key. 「You're a man after all, right? I know how you feel,」 could be felt from his gaze. He was surely the type that would ask, 「Did you enjoy the night?」 the next morning.

Since he would be understood no matter what he said, ignoring the gazes, Hajime took Yue and Shia straight to the third floor to his room. After a while, time began moving again, and everyone became noisy. Hajime, tired, ignored it.

When they entered the room, he threw Yue and Shia to their bed, and, though they complained, Hajime simply got into his and passed out.

After sleeping for several hours, Hajime was awoken by Yue for dinner. The three went down. The customers who were there when they first checked in were still present.

For a moment, Hajime could feel his cheeks twitch, but he calmed down and took a seat. The inn girl from before came as a waitress, her face red. 「Sorry about before,」 she said, but she could not hide her curiosity.

Afterward, they ordered dishes which were certainly delicious. The entire time, they had been looked at curiously; it was his first proper meal in a while, so Hajime wanted to take his time, but he

could only sigh in secret.

When it came to taking a bath, though the male and female bathing times were different, Yue and Shia intruded, causing pandemonium once again; Hajime punished them by hitting them in the head a gain. The silhouette of the inn girl could be seen moving about sneakily. When she was found peeping by the landlady, she was spanked…

Even when it came time to sleep, Yue and Shia naturally lay on Hajime's bed. Yue clung to his right arm while Shia clung to his left, crying from the coldness of the artificial arm. He could feel Shia through his pseudo nerves, especially her lethal weapons, which disturbed him mentally. Yue glared at him with dead eyes all night long…

The next morning, Hajime vowed he would reserve a double room for he and Yue without any further questioning. It did not matter if Shia sulked because of it. Yue's silence was terrible for his mental health.

After eating breakfast, Hajime handed some money to Yue and Shia and asked them to help buy the necessities for travel. There was still time before they checked out, so, while Yue and Shia were off on their errand, he would finish his preparations in the room.

「Preparations?」

Shia asked the question honestly.

「There's something I want to make. It's already planned out, so it should only take a few hours to finish. I thought about finishing it

last night but… I was strangely tired yesterday.」

He said this while glaring at Yue and Shia.

「… Is, is that so. Yue- san, is it okay for me to look for clothes?」
「… Mm, no problem. I wanted to look around the stalls.」

「Ah, that's great! We only saw them for a moment, let's go grab some food after we're done shopping!」

While averting their gazes, Yue and Shia began talking noisily. Though they knew they were the cause, they did not want to admit it.

「… You two get along really well, it seems.」 Hajime's words simply passed through their years.

In order to escape from Hajime's gaze, Shia and Yue went out to the town. Because they wanted to finish by midday, they decided to move systematically. Their goals were clothes for Shia, food, and medicine.

Currently, Shia was wearing what she had from the Sea of Trees, the native clothing of the Rabbit Clan which was like a bathing suit with a high degree of exposure, covered only by the white overcoat with blue lines which Hajime had given her in the gorge. Her tight stomach and her long, delicate legs were exposed. These clothes were not suitable to travel, so they decided to look for more. As for

weaponry and armor, they were unnecessary with Hajime in their group.

The town was already filled with the day to day hustle and bustle. The stall vendors vigorously called out to customers, and housewives and adventurers were busy haggling. There were food stalls as well, which would make one think it too crowded in the morning.

Because tool shops and grocery stores would be crowded at this time, the two decided to look for Shia's clothes first. Based on their map, there were shops for every day wear, specialty stores for high class dresses, and a store recommended for adventurers and travelers. As expected of the old w…

Catherine-san, she truly was excellent. She could accomplish anything she wished to.

The two immediately visited a shop for adventurers and decided to buy every day clothing on their way back. As expected of something Catherine recommended, there were many items which had a good quality, were practical, and functional. It was a store that would not betray expectations. However, inside was…

「Oh my～ Welcome～? What cute girls. To have come here, Onee-san is so happy～ I'll definitely～ give you a good～ service?」

There was a monster. It was 2 meters tall with a natural armor of muscles; its face was thick, and, atop its bald head, there was long hair growing from a single place, tied back in a three-knit braid by

a pink ribbon. Every time it moved, its muscles twitched. With both hands on its cheek, it twisted its body; its clothes were… not to be mentioned. At the very least, its abdominal muscles were clearly visible.

Yue and Shia froze. Shia passed out while Yue steeled herself seeing a monster beyond the demons in the Abyss.

「Oh my～ What happened, you two? Cute girls shouldn't make that kind of face～ Come now, smile, smile～」

「It's your fault!」 Yue and Shia managed to resist screaming. Even if they were above all of humanity, they did not think they could win against the beast before them.

Even so, the monster approached them with a large smile. Yue could not bear it and inadvertently muttered to herself.

「… Human?」

The monster yelled in anger.

「Who～ did you say could make a legendary demon run away! There's no credibility to that rumor, rather, the credibility is negative! How could you call me a monster!!」

「I, I'm sorry…」

Yue trembled with tears in her eyes. Shia had long since… frozen. After Yue apologized, the monster smiled (?) once again and continued its service.

「Then it's okay～? For today, what do you want to buy～?」 Shia was frozen even now while Yue had steeled her resolve to

look for Shia's clothes. Perhaps it was because they wanted to return, but Shia gripped the Yue's skirt in her hand and shook her head. After smiling, the monster said, 「Leave it to me～」 and carried Shia on its shoulders into the store. At that time, Yue looked at Shia who was essentially like a pig sold for its meat.

In conclusion, the monster, the manager, that is, was called Crystabel-san. Shia, who was taken inside the store, realized this and was undeniably grateful when offered a dressing room.

Yue and Shia expressed their gratitude to Crystabel and felt a charm from the manager's smile. It was a woman's (?) virtue.

「Well～ I was worried about what would happen to me at first, but Manager-san was an unexpectedly good person.」

「Mm… Can't judge by appearances.」 「Right～」

While chatting away, they wandered to their next destination, the tool shop; however, the two clearly stood out. On their way, by the time they noticed, they had been surrounded by ten men. Most were adventurers, but there was clearly someone from a shop somewhere, as he wore an apron.

One of the men came forward. Though Yue did not remember it, this man was one of the adventurers in the guild when they talked to Catherine.

「Your names are Yue-chan and Shia-chan, right?」「…? That's right.」

Yue squinted her eyes, not knowing what the man wanted. Shia, because she was a demi-human, was surprised they called her with "chan."

The man looked back at the others and nodded. Yue could see them harden their resolve. The other men stood before them.

Then…

「「「「「Yue-chan, please go out with me!!」」」」」

「「「「「Shia-chan! Please be my slave!!」」」」」

In short, it was like that. The pick-up lines for Yue and Shia were different because Shia was a demi- human. Even though transfer of ownership required the permission of the master, they were clear on how intimate the two were given Hajime's conversation with the two at the inn. To persuade Hajime, they would have to get Shia first… or so they thought.

As an aside, perhaps because of the impact from the conversation at the inn was too strong, everyone present forgot that a slave pact made it impossible for the slave to oppose the master. If not, they would have discovered that Shia was not a slave. Though the strength of a pact could be weakened, no one ever actually did that.

As for Yue and Shia who were confessed to…

「… Shia, the tool shop is over here.」

「Ah, yes. It will be good if we can buy everything at once.」 They continued walking as if nothing had happened.

「W, wait a moment! What about your answer!? Please tell us

your ans—」 「No.」

「I refuse.」

「… Gu… in… an instant…」

Since the two seemed to think nothing of the confession, the men let out a groan while some fell to their knees and crumbled on the spot. There were some, however, that did not give up.

Because of their high level of beauty, it could not be helped that the men became reckless.

「Then I'll make you mine by force!」

A reckless man shouted that out; some of the others surrounded the two, impatiently drawing closer.

The man who talked to them first jumped out to catch Yue. Yue coldly muttered a single phrase.

「— "Frozen Coffin."」

The man was immediately confined inside a coffin of ice except his head.

The other men knew Frozen Coffin was classified as an Advance Rank Water Magic and were shocked that Yue invoked it just by

saying its name. They could be heard saying, 「She must have chanted before hand,」 and 「The magic formation is in her clothes.」

Yue walked up to the determined man wrapped in ice. Though everyone was shocked by Yue's magic prowess, Yue had to give them a warning to prevent anything like this from happening again.

Yue released the ice wrapping the man little by little. The man was glad that he would be released. He watched Yue with feverish eyes.

「Y, Yue-chan! I'm sorry that I was so sudden! But, I really do think of you as…」

Though the man wrapped in ice tried to express his feelings, his words stopped. This was because he noticed the small place where the ice was melted.

「U, umm, Yue-chan? Why, ah, why… is only the part down there melted?」

Yue had melted the ice between the man's groin. The man was still completely restrained. Because he felt something bad would soon happen, he was in a cold sweat. 「That's impossible, right? Right? Right!?」 Then he saw Yue's expression.

Yue curved her mouth slightly. 「… Aim and shoot.」

Volleys of gravel continuously hit the man's nether region.

- Aghh—!!

- Stop already!
- Mother～!

The man's screams resounded through the morning street. The sound of Mario collecting coins could be heard as the man was continuously taking blows (The actual sound is frightening, so please substitute it with this nostalgic noise) at his crotch. He was being hit back and forth like a boxer subjected to the DeOpsey Roll.

The surrounding men, and not just the ones that had approached them, crumbled, holding their groins in their hands.

The barrage that seemed to continue for eternity finally stopped in consideration of the man who had lost consciousness. Though it was impossible with only a single blow, the accumulated damage had caused him to go over the edge. Yue blew over her index finger and left words of parting.

「… Good, I'm sure you can become a wonderful maiden.」 On this day, a man died and became the second Crystabel, thus

christened Mariabel-chan. This person, under Crystabel's training, would become manager of the branch store, increasing the fame of the shop… though that was a separate story.

Yue earned her nickname, “Crotch Smasher” which caused uproars in the Adventurer Guild, even the capital; she was capable of making male adventurers shudder.

Yue and Shia ignored the frightened gazes and continued their shopping. They also ignored the girls who could be heard saying, 「Yue Onee-sama…」

By the time Yue and Shia returned to the hotel, Hajime had finished his own work.

「Welcome back,」 Hajime tried to say as he saw the two enter, but his eyebrows twitched seeing Shia’s appearance.

「E he he～ How is it, Hajime-san? Do I look a bit more like an adventurer now?」

Saying this, Shia spun around. She wore a short skirt which had a dangerous feeling to it, her navel was exposed, and her breasts were heavily emphasized by her jacket.

In all honesty, the degree of exposure had barely changed. What changed most was that, instead of sandals, she was now wearing thigh-high boots. But above that, nothing much had changed.

「… What on earth are you doing? You're just pointlessly exposing yourself, you shameless rabbit…」

「My, Hajime -san, what are you sa ying? Just look. This skirt and these hot pants, aren't they perfectly preventing any panty shots?」

Saying this, Shia quietly lifted her skirt though she was still embarrassed. Like she said, she wore white hot pants with what appeared to be some strong cloth. The jacket, as well as her bathing-suit like clothes, the so called bikini- armor, properly protected her heart. Still, her beautiful navel was fully exposed, and her enchanting thighs were visible with a single glance, even if her vitals were protected.

「… Mm. More clothes will make Shia's movements duller.」 Yue gave an explanation. Apparently, despite the clothes not covering much, he could have good expectations of their

defensive abilities, and they had chosen this kind of armor to avoid her movements from becoming slower. Even if the clothes were essentially no different from the native clothes of the Rabbit Clan, her defense had jumped up a level, and she seemed to have settled on the style of wearing the overcoat Yue had made. If the person in question was satisfied, Hajime decided not to worry about it.

「Well, it's fine as long as you've accomplished your goal. For the time being, thanks for handling the shopping. By the way, the town seems noisy, did something happen?」

He had noticed the commotion. 「… No problem.」

「Ah～ yeah, that's right. No problem at all.」

They had seen a monster as a clothing store manager and saw as Heaven called to a man, yet the two said it was nothing. Though Hajime felt a little suspicious, he simply let it go.

「Did you buy everything you need?」「… Mm, don't worry.」

「That's right. There's a lot of food, but we got enough. It really is convenient having Treasure Warehouse.」

For shopping, Hajime entrusted "Treasure Warehouse" to the two. Having seen Shia look at the ring enviously, Hajime could only smile wryly. With his current proficiency, he was unable to make his own version of "Treasure Warehouse." When the time came that he could craft it, it would be most convenient, so he would definitely give one to them.

「Now then, Shia, this is yours.」

While saying this, Hajime passed Shia a cylindrical object 40 centimeters in diameter and 50 centimeters in length. It was a silver cylinder with a handle on its side.

Shia was confused to receive this gift from Hajime, and she strengthened her body once she felt its weight.

「Wh, what is this? It's really heavy…」

「Well, it's your new hammer. It's best that it's heavy.」「Ehh, this is…?」

Shia was doubtful. The object did not look like a hammer at all, and the handle was short. No matter how she looked at it, it was unbalanced.

「Yeah, that's its standby state. For now, put some magic into it.」
「Um, like this? Hm!?」

As he said, she poured magic into the hammer. Sounds of machinery could be heard as the handle extended to the right length. The hammer was an artifact: Drücken (named by Hajime.) It was equipped with special gimmicks that could be used by Shia just by pouring magic into specific parts of the weapon.

What Hajime wanted to finish was this weapon. When Yue and Shia went shopping earlier, he had been making it.

「It's my current limit. I'll look at it again once I get better. We don't know what will happen from now on. Though you received training from Yue, it was only for 10 days, so it's still dangerous for you. I made this weapon when thinking about how to use your power to the limit. Make sure you master it, okay? You're our companion now, so don't die without permission, got it?」

「Hajime-san… Fu fu, your speech is all over the place～ I'm fine. Though I'm still not strong enough, I'll follow you anywhere!」

Shia happily embraced Drücken. Because she was happy, Yue felt a little ill-humored, but she knew it was unavoidable. Hajime simply smiled wryly. He did not want to admit it, to see a beautiful girl so happy over a hammer she received as a present from him was

surreal.

With the joyous Shia now in their company, they finished checking out of the inn. Even now, they ignored the girl who looked at them with blushing cheeks.

When they got outside, the sun was already at its peak, and its warmth enveloped them. With his arms spread, Hajime took a deep breath. When he turned around, he could see the two smiling.

Hajime nodded and began to advance. It was time to travel again.

Chapter 3

While Hajime and Yue were in 【Hartsenna Sea of Trees,】 remodeling the mild, gentle rabbits into a tough death squad, the Hero Party led by Amanogawa Kouki was in the outskirts of 【Post Town Horuad】outside of 【Orcus Great Labyrinth】resting.

They had diligently trained while going through the dungeon. They had finally reached Floor 70 of 【Orcus Great Labyrinth,】 and the quality of the demons had improved significantly, their rest was well earned.

Commander Meld and the knights of the Kingdom were no longer able to keep up, so making it this far was primarily due to Kouki's group. When they had reached Floor 70, they found a teleportation formation connecting Floors 30 and 70, and Commander Meld thought it a good time for them to rest.

As such, in 2, 3 days of rest, Kouki and his party would challenge the Labyrinth again without relying on Commander Meld.

Meanwhile, somewhere at the edge of 【Horuad,】someone could be heard roughly breathing.

「Haa, haa… Restrain stigma of light, Seal the following calamity, "Binding Light Blades!"」

While panting, pushing down on her knees which seemed as though they would crumble at any moment, wielding a pure white staff,

was the “Healer” of the Hero Party, Shirasaki Kaori.

Originally, this staff showed her prowess for Recovery Magic, but she had formed multiple crosses of light hear — the restrictive Light Magic “Binding Light Blades” which was beyond her specialty.

Kaori assaulted these wolf demons, “Diros” with these crosses of light. The crosses quickly moved against the beasts which were approaching Kaori.

「— “Binding Light Chains.”」

She immediately activated a separate restriction magic. Normally, a magic without an incantation was weak, but the earlier aria combined this current magic with “Binding Light Blades.” As such, the effect was beyond expectations.

Suddenly, chains of light appeared from below the wolves’ feet, wrapping around them in an instant. The demons’ rush finally came to an end.

One Diros which barely managed to escape the chains of light approached Kaori from behind, but Kaori did not seem anxious as it charged toward her.

「Fall.」

Immediately after she shouted, crosses of light rained down from the sky, skewering the creatures. Since they were made of magic, there was no magic and simply sewed the creatures to the ground

and walls. In that sense, they were similar to “Binding Light Chains.”

Kaori, after confirming the magic that she had released was effective against demons in the Labyrinth began chanting a short aria.

「Light of conviction, Seal the forbidden restraints. Crush the unrighteous.」

This restraining magic which had no offensive abilities cause the wolves to scream in agony. This was the phrase which pulled the “Binding Light Chains” into the ground along with the captured target.

Even if there was no immediate offensive power to this magic, it had an attack aspect to it. However, it was difficult to use because it required an appropriate image and arrangement of the magic formation to properly utilize it.

This was the reason Kaori came to this place. The demons in the outskirts were far weaker than those in the Labyrinth, and she was able to manage combat on her own here; she was driven to practice this difficult technique.

However, she had spent numerous hours training already, and she was mentally and physically fatigued. Her magic had been drained as well; in truth, her vision was hazy, and her thoughts were dim.

Kaori approached her limits.

But there was still light remaining in her eyes. That day, she understood someone important to her disappeared; she had decided soon after that she would confirm everything with her own eyes. Despite her frozen heart, her eyes burned bright.

She was driven, her mind would not permit her to stop or rest. That was why,

「Light of protection appear in succession, Revive so long as there is a will — “Heavenly Divide!!”」

Fresh demon forces appear from the sky, she would not show her back and run away. Even if she knows it to be unreasonable, even if she understands the foolishness of her actions, she would always whisper to herself “something of this level” or “I won’t be able to protect my promises again,” and her feet stopped moving.

The demons in the sky, called “Bahal,” had black wings like crows. Though they were not particularly strong, adventurers typically avoided them. The reason was because of the black feathers which were pouring down on Kaori at this moment.

These demons never approached the ground and only fired off their feathers, stiff like knives, to fight.

Kaori prevented the feathers from hitting her using a shield of light

which had been compressed into her palm.

(I need a clearer image. I need to be faster, more efficient. I need a strong barrier, and even if I'm not as good as Suzu-chan… I need to make up for it with technique!!)

With a stiff expression, Kaori was able to develop a multi- layered shield despite it not being her forte, but she still felt it insufficient. She manipulated the ten shields one by one, angling them so they did not receive the attacks but averted them instead.

If the sole "Barrier Master" of the Hero Party, Suzu, saw this, she would not be able to help but stare at this in shock. Kaori had an aptitude for Light Magic, so, as a Healer, she had achieved a level of barrier formation rivaling her. Everyone in the world would be stunned to see this.

「Haa, haa…」

But Kaori did not smile. The Bahal's attack had surpassed her barrier, and she was injured; she bit her lips to keep her consciousness, which had almost been blown away from the overuse of magic and strain of daily training. Her body was on the verge of collapse, and she was only holding on with her staff artifact and willpower.

Because a Bahal's attack uses its wings, it requires time for the feathers to regenerate before it can attack again. Kaori took this chance to use "Binding Light Blades" and "Heavenly Divide" again, beginning her incantation.

「Ah…」

She lost her strength, and her body tilted forward. At that moment,

the magic binding the enemies resolved. Most of the Diros had fainted, but one or two stood up, glaring at Kaori with red eyes as she began coughing.

Her hazy thoughts alerted her, but her weak body would not listen to her.

The Diros ran at her. Their drool spread everywhere as they groaned. Kaori supported herself with her staff and a knee, roughly breathing as she prepared to restrain them with magic again, but… she no longer could.

Just before the beasts' fangs were about to break through Kaori's soft, fair skin,

「Kaori!」

A voice she was accustomed to hearing called her name. At the same time, the Diros were all cut.

「Sh, Shizuku-chan?」

「Yes, that's right. Your best friend, Shizuku-chan. The one whose anger is reaching the skies now, Shizuku-chan. The one who wants to pinch your cheeks until they swell up right now, Shizuku-chan.」

「U, um… a ha ha… sorry.」

In front of Kaori who had sunk down, staring at her from close in as she apologized and tried to brush the issue aside with a laugh, was

her best friend — Yaegashi Shizuku. 「Why is she angry?」 to the point of wanting to pinch Kaori's cheeks until they were swollen, and why Shizuku was in a bad mood, it was clear to Kaori.

「Honestly. I told you not to overwork yourself. Rather, I promised that we would do this together! Even for demons in this area, if you aren't careful, you could easily die, right!? Don't you want to find Nagumo-kun!? If you die, then there's no point! You idiot! Stupid! Stubborn!」

「Uu… I'm sorry, Shizuku-chan.」

「No～ I won't forgive you so easily! I take my eyes off you for a moment and you run off on your own. How are you any different from Ryuutarou, you muscle brained girl! I know you're trying to develop new techniques, but, to the end, you're in the rear. You can't become a vanguard, no matter wh at. You really just need to call me, and make sure you have a safety margin! Why can't you just ask me! Hey, are you even listening, Kaori!?」

「I, I'm listening… I'm sorry.」

「No way, I can't believe your apology, I don't trust it at all! You sit there right now! I'll be chewing your ear off until it soaks in today!!」

Shizuku stood in front of Kaori and pointed straight between her eyes, beginning her sermon.

Kaori secretly thought, 「I'm tired, I can't really understand Shizuku- chan all that well…」 but she understood Shizuku was worried about her and wanted to support her, so Kaori simply sat

there and listened to Shizuku preach like a mother.

As an aside, some of the other Diros, who had awoken, approached while Shizuku was preaching, and the Bahals were able to attack again, but Shizuku said, 「Right, I forgot about them,」 and put them in order in 5 seconds before returning to lecture Kaori. Finally, the white of Kaori's eyes were visible, unworthy of this beautiful girl, as she began to faint.

「Wa wa wa, Kaorin's face doesn't even looking like human anymore!」

「Sh, Shizuku… I don't mind you lecturing here, but do it after she recovers her magic…」

Taniguchi Suzu and Nakamuri Eri arrived. They all had come together to search for Kaori, but Shizuku ran ahead alone, her Kaori sensor splendidly showing its effect.

Shizuku's nonstop lecture was interrupted by their voices. Seeing the white of Kaori's eyes as her head began staggering, Shizuku groaned and pulled out a small bottle of medicine from her pouch, thrusting it into Kaori's half open mouth.

「Nmu,」 Kaori's voice leaked. 「Hey, hurry up and swallow,」 Shizuku said as she forced Kaori to drink while supporting her bottle. Shizuku used her finger to wipe away some of the medicine which had spilled out, and when seen from the side…

「Shizu Shizu, you're like a mo—」

「Suzu, did you know there are some things you should never say if you feel your life is precious?」

Suzu was about to say words which should never be said about a young high school girl, while Eri stopped her in a panic.

And when Kaori finally regained her beautiful girl status, Kouki could be heard calling from a distance.

「It looks like Kaori is fine. That's great…」

「Ohh, it's not like her to do the unreasonable. We came back above ground to get rest, it won't be good if she causes other problems, she really needs to hold back a bit.」

Kouki sat beside Kaori in relief, putting a hand on her shoulder as he smiled, and Ryuutarou spoke somewhat awkwardly. The two were worried about Kaori in their own way.

「Everyone, I'm sorry for ignoring your concerns and worrying you. I thought I would be fine taking care of demons in this area alone… but it really is time to stop this. Really, I'm sorry.」

Kaori apologized for doing something unreasonable alone and causing so much trouble. With Shizuku's mother-mode cleared away at last, the atmosphere grew more relaxed.

Kouki proposed everyone return to town first, and everyone agreed.

When Kaori tried to stand, she staggered. Even if her magic had recovered to some degree, she was still physically exhausted.

Kouki reached to support Kaori…

「Kaori, are you okay?」

「Uu, Shizuku-chan… thank you. I'll walk, but it will be a little late.」

Shizuku supported Kaori naturally, and Kouki's hand lost a place to go. Though Kouki seemed a little sad, such a thing would not break the Hero. Kouki was about to offer to carry her when Kaori mentioned it would be late by the time they returned. Of course, he would hold her like a princess. However…

「Honestly, can't be helped. I hope you learn from this experience. It will be faster if I carry you, right?」

「Eh, Shizuku -chan. Th, that's embarrassing.」 「Fu fu, think of it as punishment then.」

The Fencer who can survive in the lower levels of a Great Labyrinth could easily support a single girl. Therefore, she held Kaori like a princess while Kaori blushed in embarrassment. Shizuku walked readily with a smile, a dignified atmosphere, and a sword at her waist. Seeing her hold a slender girl, she was like a hero out of fairy tales…

「My, Shizu Shizu, you're seriously a playboy.」 「A ha ha… I feel like I can see flowers.」

Suzu's face was dyed red while Eri had a wry smile.

As for Kouki, a smile on his face and his hand stretched out still, Ryuutarou tapped his shoulder in comfort.

「Even in another world, Kaori's knight will always be Shizuku…

Well, keep at it, Kouki.」

「Ryuutarou, I don't particularly mind. Ah, don't worry about it. Really.」

「… I see. For now, let's grab some food.」「… Yeah.」

The muscle headed partner of the Hero expressed his concern, oddly enough.

Afterward, they returned to town, and, after getting enough rest, Commander Meld, Nagayama's group, and Hiyama's party joined Kouki as they moved to challenge the unexplored 70th Floor again.

No one noticed the bomb they held in their hands.

Nor did they notice the large shadow approaching them.

A mountain of corpses.

These were the only words fitting of the spectacle in 【Raisen Gorge.】Some demons had their heads smashed open while others were pulverized; some had their bodies carbonized. Though there were a variety of killing methods, they all had died in a single blow.

Naturally, within this hell that was feared as an execution ground, there were…

「One hit kill～!」 Zugan!!

「… Hindrance.」 Goban!!

「Shut up.」 Dopan!!

Hajime, Yue, and Shia had left Brook (with Yue and Shia's fans seeing them off) on Stiefe and passed through the entrance of 【Raisen Gorge.】After advancing and camping along the way, they had already passed through the cave concealing a path to 【Orcus Great Labyrinth.】It had been 2 days since then, in fact.

Inside 【Raisen Gorge,】demons continued to attack as usual. Shia's hammer was swung with immense force, smashing

demons. It truly was a one hit kill. The demons were crushed to death with normal attacks which far surpassed their defenses. Even the moon rabbit who pounded mochi had a destructive power which paled compared to this.

As for Yue, she closed in on demons and slaughtered them with magic instantly invoked using power from her equipment. Though Yue herself had enormous magical power, with the Magic Crystal Series, this magic power was even larger. Her attacks were like an endless bombing. Even with magic dispersed in the canyon, the

casting time extended, and the range shortened, she was able to invoke high temperature flames and carbonize demons without exception.

Hajime, needless to say, sniped at their heads with Donner while driving Stiefe; though it was consuming his power to use “Lightning Clad” and driving Stiefe at the same time, there was no sign that he would tire out any time soon.

The demons dominating the canyon were completely treated as small fry. They were annihilated as a side job as the three searched for signs of the Great Labyrinth. Their corpses buried the path they had traveled.

「Haa～ It should be somewhere inside Raisen, but it really is too large.」

They moved while checking for caves; though they were thorough, they had not found a single entrance. Hajime could only inadvertently complain.

「Well, we’ll reach the Volcano eventually, so it’s find not to find anything. We might find clues there, after all.」

「Well, even if you say that…」

「Mm… But these demons make it gloomy.」「Ah～ Yue-san also dislikes this place～」

While complaining and being disgusted by the demons that kept

coming, they had traveled for 3 days.

They had no results to show for their day when night set in. The beautiful shine of the crescent moon could be seen up in the sky, so Hajime and the two girls started to prepare for camp. After taking out their tent, they prepared dinner with ingredients and seasonings they bought in town. The tent and cooking utensils were all things Hajime had made.

He had created the tent with Creation Magic. It had a “Heating Stone” and “Cooling Stone” installed to keep it at a comfortable temperature at all times. It was also equipped with a “Cooling Stone” powered “Refrigerator” and “Freezer.” The metal frame was created with “Presence Interception” so they would not be easily found by enemies.

For the cooking utensils, he had made a frying pan and kettle with an adjustable flame, proportional to the amount of magic used. There was a kitchen knife endowed with “Wind Claw” which could maintain a sharp edge using magic. There was also a steam- cleaner like object. They were Hajime’s beloved children that would help them with meals on their travel. Furthermore, because they could only be used with direct magic manipulation, they had a natural crime prevention system.

“Age of Gods Magic is really convenient.”

Those were the words Hajime said when he made the cooking artifacts and the tent. It was useless technology. The objects themselves were not useless, they were simply uselessly refined.

For dinner today, they had Kurul Chicken simmered in tomato soup.

Kurul Chicken was a bird capable of flying in the sky; it's quality and taste were much like a chicken on Earth, and it was a popular form of poultry in this world. The meat was cut into bite- sized pieces and breaded and sauteed. It was then boiled with vegetables in tomato soup.

It had just the right amount of butter and juice, and the tomato's acidity permeated the nostrils. The flavors spread throughout when it hit the tongue, and the meat seemed to crumble in the mouth. The potatoes (fake,) carrots (fake,) and onions (fake) had the right amount of sweetness. The bread seemed to melt when dipping it into the delicious broth.

They finished dinner with full satisfaction and immersed themselves in the lingering flavor. The three simply talked as always. Inside the tent, they spent a leisurely time, not worrying about the demons due to the properties of the tent. Though there were demons that approached occasionally, Hajime simply stuck his hand out the window and shot. Furthermore, when it came time for sleep, the three rotated lookout duties until the morning.

Today, Hajime was taking the first guard while Yue and Shia prepared to sleep. Because there were soft futons inside the tent, they could sleep comfortably despite it being a camp. Shia left the tent before getting into bed.

Hajime, suspicious about what she was doing, asked her why she was leaving.

「I want to pick flowers for a while.」

「There are no flowers here, you know?」 「Hajime-san～!」

Hajime's words lacked any delicacy, destroying Shia's calm face. She stared at him angrily. Hajime, who obviously knew what she was angry about, simply said 「My bad, my bad」 without any sign of remorse.

Shia quickly went away from the tent, angry. After some time…

「H, Hajime-san~! Yue-san~! It's an emergency! Please come here~!」

Shia shouted, forgetting about any demons that might be lurking nearby. Wondering what happened, the two looked at each other and dashed out of the tent.

When they arrived at where Shia was, they saw a huge monolith leaning on the canyon wall. Shia was stuck inside a small cavern which was open now that the monolith had fallen down.

「Here, over here! I found it!」

「I get it, but get out of there for now. Looks like you used full body strengthening. Aren't you a bit too excited?」

「… Annoying.」

The frolicking Shia was pulled out by Hajime and Yue. As they pulled her out, Hajime ended up getting a good feel, which caused Yue to frown gloomily. Afterward, guided by Shia, they were able to enter the hollow interior which was wider than expected. Having entered this space, Shia, silently and with a proud expression, pointed her finger at the wall.

Hajime and Yue looked at where she pointed while blinking their eyes in surprise.

Before the two was a large rectangular sign board which was embedded in the wall. Oddly feminine characters were carved there.

“Come in! Into Mildy Raisen’s thrilling Great Labyrinth ♪”

The punctuation was particularly irritating. 「… The hell is this?」

「… What is this?」

Hajime and Yue spoke simultaneously. 「I’m seeing something ridiculous right now!」 their expressions were saying. The two stared blankly at the sign inside the hellish canyon.

「Why are you asking! It’s the entrance! The Great Labyrinth! I found it by chance when I went to… pick flowers. Well~ This is the real thing, this is the Great Labyrinth inside Raisen Gorge!」

Shia’s happy voice echoed, finally pulling Hajime and Yue out of their stupor. They looked at each other, perplexed.

「… Yue, you think it’s real?」 「… Mm.」

「That was a long pause. Your basis?」 「… Mildy.」

「So it was that after all…」

“Mildy” was Raisen’s first name, and the name had appeared in Oscar’s memoirs. Though the name Raisen was known to the world, the owner’s first name was not. The chance this was the Great Labyrinth was high.

No matter what, though, they had difficulty believing it. 「Why this kind of character…」

Considering the desperate fights in Orcus Great Labyrinth, as well as the other Great Labyrinths that would be sure to come, this was far too lighthearted, making him lose all strength. Yue also understood the severity of a Great Labyrinth, so she, too, thought it was part of a prank.

「But we couldn’t see the entrance, right? It’s a dead end inside…」

Not noticing what was going on in Hajime and Yue’s minds, Shia thought aloud about where the entrance was. She looked around and eventually hit a hollow part of the wall.

「Hey, Shia, don’t…」 Gakon!

「Fukya!」

“Don’t carelessly move around,” Hajime was unable to finish saying as a part of the wall Shia touched rotated. Shia disappeared on the other side of the wall, It was a revolving door.

「「…」」

The credibility of the signboard miraculously increased when Shia found the entrance to the Great Labyrinth. It was located here, after all. Even though they had a mountain of complaints after seeing the amusing invitation, Hajime and Yue, having seen Shia silently disappear, looked at each other and sighed, placing their hands on the rotating door, just like Shia.

Having activated the door, the two were brought to the other side. The inside was pitch black, and the door rotated back to its former position.

At that time, Hyu, Hyu, Hyu! Sounds of something flying at them resounded in the midst of the darkness. Hajime immediately activated “Night Vision” and discovered numerous arrows painted jet black to avoid reflecting light, and they were flying to eliminate any intruders who entered.

With Donner in his right hand, Hajime used his left hand to beat down the flying black arrows. Metal hit metal, and not a single arrow was missed.

There were twenty arrows scattered on the ground. Silence returned once the final arrow was knocked down.

At the same time, the surrounding walls began to shine. The area Hajime and Yue was in was a room 10 meters wide in every direction. Straight ahead was a passage leading deeper in. There was a lithograph in the room with similar words as those on the signboard from before.

“Were you scared? Hey, did that scare you? Then you’re just a little brat.

“Or were you injured? Did someone die? … Bufu”

「「…」」

Hajime and Yue could only think of the words, 「How annoying.」 The parts carved on the lithograph which were specifically

provoking them were clearly carved with more emphasis. If one of them had actually died, then surely the survivors would curse the heavens.

They were so irritated, veins could be seen on their heads. Yue muttered something she just remembered.

「… Shia?」「Ah.」

Hajime finally remembered as well and looked back at the rotating door in a panic. Because the door only did one rotation at a time, her not being here meant she got out when Hajime and Yue entered. Even though some time had passed, she had not returned, which gave him an unpleasant feeling. He immediately activated the rotating door.

Shia was… there as expected. She was bound to the rotating door.

「Uu, Gusu, Hajime-san… please don’t look～ I want you to take

these out, hic, but please don't look at me～」

She truly had a pitiful appearance. Though Shia was unable to see the arrows that came flying at her, she likely used her natural searching ability to somehow dodge them from the sound; however, it was truly a last-second attempt, since her clothes were pierced here and there. She looked like the man on the emergency exit sign.

Her rabbit ears were bent into a lightning bolt shape; her body twitched, knowing she had done the impossible. Shia was not crying out of a fear of death. The main reason was because…

her feet were quite wet.

「Now that I think about it, you said you were going to pick some flowers… well, what should I say, you only did what was necessary…」

「Don't say it! Uu～ Why didn't I just finish before～!!」

She had an appearance a woman would never want to show, especially since it was to the man she had fallen for. Her rabbit ears were drooping down. Even so, even if she spent a century with him, Hajime thought it was already too late for her. That was why he simply stared at her in amazement, hollowing out Shia's heart even more.

「… Don't move.」

Perhaps because Yue, too, was a woman, she had a sympathetic face as she released Shia from her crucifixion.

「… I'll do something about it. You're still an amateur.」「This is so embarrassing～ Gusu.」

「… Hajime, change of clothes.」「On it.」

He pulled Shia's change of clothes from "Treasure Warehouse." She changed quickly while blushing.

Finally, Shia's preparations were finished. 「It's time to conquer the Labyrinth!」she shouted enthusiastically, only to notice the lithograph.

Her hair concealed her expression. Shia stood silent for a while and slowly took out Drücken, striking the lithograph with all her might. Perhaps unable to endure it any longer, she swung Drücken many times, as if attacking her parents' enemies.

In the place of the broken lithograph, characters carved on the ground could be found.

"Sorry～ This lithograph will repair on its own after some time～!!

「Mukiii—!!」

Shia was truly enraged and began swinging Drücken around intensely. The small room shook as if a small earthquake was focused inside it. Impacts could be heard numerous times.

Hajime watched Shia with a skeptical gaze.

「Mildy Raisen, rather than a member of the “Liberators,” she is undoubtedly an enemy of all creatures.」

「… I agree.」

Apparently the Great Labyrinth of Raisen would be difficult in a different way from Orcus Great Labyrinth.

It was several hours after Shia had gone mad.

In that time, the group had learned how truly annoying this place was.

First of all, magic could not be used properly. The degree of magic dispersal was far stronger than inside the canyon. For Yue, who specialized in magic, this place was a heavy burden. She was unable to use Advance Rank magic, and the range of the magic she could use was 5 meters at the most. Somehow, it was enough for combat; however, she was not strong enough to deliver a one hit kill.

In addition, though the amount of magic stored inside the Magic Crystal Series did not decrease here, it could not be recklessly used. Her consumption rate was far too severe. Yue was only able to use Intermediate Rank magic because she was a genius; most people would be unable to use anything.

Even Hajime was greatly affected by it. The Unique Skills he used which worked by emitting magic outside his body such as “Air Walk” and “Wind Claw” were unusable; even the output of “Lightning Clad” was greatly diminished. Donner & Schlag also fell below half the normal power, and Schlagen’s maximum output was roughly at the level of the typical Donner and Schlag.

Body strengthening was the most important magic in this Great Labyrinth. Amongst the three, Shia had become the main player.

As for the reliable rabbit-eared girl in the group…

「I’ll take care of this… definitely, when we reach the dwelling, I’ll mess it up so much it’ll be like a storm passed through.」

With Drücken over her shoulder, she examined her surroundings as if trying to find prey. Her anger was obvious; it was very deep. Even her intonation was odd. The cause was, obviously, Mildy Raisen’s mischievousness.

Because they understood how Shia felt, Hajime and Yue could say nothing about it. Often times, when one person was severely agitated, those in the surrounding were, oppositely, calm. That was where Hajime and Yue stood. As they advanced, they had encountered various traps and words meant to provoke them. For that reason, while Shia was truly enraged, Hajime and Yue were also irritated.

「Fu hi hi」 Finally, a strange laughter came from near Shia; they advanced down the passage while carefully observing the surroundings, trying their best to avoid the terrible traps.

A few minutes later, something mysterious appeared.

Inside were stairwells and passages with no sign of regularity; it was as if someone had casually combined Lego blocks to create this place. The stairs from the 1st floor were connected to a passage on the 3rd floor, and the passage on the 3rd floor gradually became a slope connecting to the 1st floor's hallway. Meanwhile, the 2nd floor stairwell was connected to nothing but a wall; it was truly a mess.

「Once again, I can see why this is a Labyrinth.」「… Mm, confusing.」

「Hmph, as expected of a Labyrinth made by a rotten person. This mess is an expression of her mind.」

「… We understand how you feel, but it's about time you calm down.」

Shia was enraged even now. Hajime, half in surprise and half in amazement, said, 「How should we advance now,」 while thinking about it.

「… Hajime, no other method.」

「Hm～ well, you're right. For now, let's advance while making marks and mapping the area.」

「Mm…」

Hajime nodded to Yue's words. Mapping was a basic for exploring a dungeon; however, Hajime unconsciously frowned when he thought about how troublesome it would be to accurately map out such a complicated Labyrinth.

Also, what Hajime meant by "marking" was to use unique magic known as "Tracking." It operated by leaving a "mark" of magic power on the places he touched. When the "mark" was used on living things, he could track where they moved. In this place, Hajime put his "mark" on the wall. Because it could be made visible, Yue and Shia were also able to see it. Perhaps because the magic power was applied directly, it did not disperse. Hajime placed a "mark" on the wall nearest the entrance they took and advanced.

The hall was 2 meters wide and made from countless blocks which looked like bricks. Because the walls emitted a faint light, there was no problem with their vision. Perhaps it was made of a different material than the Green Light Stone, since it gave off a bluish light.

When Hajime tried using "Mineral Investigation" on it, he found it was called "Phosphorous Ore." It gave off a light when in contact with air. The first room likely did not have any since there was no light present. It was reminiscent of the cave in LaOuta where the Levitation Stone was found. There was an old man's voice that came out of the stone then, though.

It was an anime masterpiece Hajime unintentionally thought of as they advanced down the long passageway. Suddenly,

Gakon!

Out of nowhere, one of the blocks Hajime stepped on sunk into the floor. 「Eh?」everyone said as they looked down.

At that moment, Shaaa!!

Gliding blades could be heard, and, in the space between the blocks on the wall, large saw-toothed blades came out at high speed. The blades approached them at neck-height on the right and waist-height on the left.

「Dodge!」

Hajime shouted immediately and leaned back while the two behind also tried to dodge. Yue was small in the first place, so she simply had to squat down. Shia was also able to manage as well. 「Ha wa wa ha wa wa wa」he could hear behind him. Because there was no sign of pain in her voice, Hajime felt she had been unharmed.

Actually, it was truly by a hair's breadth, since the tip of the fur on her rabbit ears was cut… still, it was not a problem.

The two blades filled with murderous intent and malice were unable to do anything to the three, so they disappeared into the walls. While vigilant of a second wave, Hajime checked the surroundings carefully; however, the trap had ended. He let out a sigh and looked back, only to feel a chill.

He jumped away on reflex, using his momentum to pull Yue and Shia with him. Countless blades fell where they were a moment ago, just like a guillotine, cutting into the earth as if it were butter.

As expected, the blades were also rotating at high speeds just like the ones from before.

Hajime looked at the blades just a few centimeters ahead of them with a cold sweat. Yue and Shia were also frozen.

「… This trap was completely physical; I couldn't sense it with my Evil Eye.」

Hajime had been able to avoid traps until now because they were magic traps. Every trap in this Great Labyrinth had been magical in nature, so he had always seen them with his Evil Eye. For that reason, he had the thought that he would be fine so long as his Evil Eye did not react. In short, he overestimated his power.

「Hauu~ I, I thought I was dead~ Actually, Hajime-san! Please stop it if it was that much! Isn't that why you have an artificial arm!?」

「Well, they were sharp, right? Even if it won't cut through, it can leave scratches. I can't use "Strength of Gold" right now, after all.」

「S, scratches… between me and your equipment, which is more important?」

「… Well, you're safe now. Isn't that good?」

「Wh, why are you evading the topic! You're lying, right? I'm more

important, right!?」

Hajime played around as she continued questioning him. Yue added her own verbal abuse.

「… Leaking rabbit. You're dying from your own inexperience.」
「L, Leaking, please take that back, Yue-san! No matter what you say, that was a disgrace for me!」

Shia received yet a new title to her 「OOO Rabbit 」series as she endured it with a protest. Having entered this Labyrinth, though she almost died twice in short succession, Shia was unexpectedly energetic. As expected, Shia's forte was taking hits, though the person herself would not admit it.

It was just as Shia had said; there were other choices to evade the surprise attack, since Hajime should have been able to stop the blades with his artificial arm. His coat made of demon skin also had a high defense, and he had protectors beneath to guard his vitals, so he would not have died from an attack of that level.

Even so, the trap was nothing but overkill for normal humans. Normal armor would easily be cut in two, since they would not have been made from materials he obtained in the Abyss.

「Well, it's no problem if it's that much.」

While watching Yue and Shia quarrel, Hajime spoke to himself. No matter how powerful, physical traps alone would not kill Hajime.

Yue also had “Automatic Regeneration,” so she would not die, either. In other words… Shia was the only one in danger. He did not know if she noticed or not, likely due to her stress.

「Eh? Hajime-san, what’s with those pitying eyes…」「Please live strongly, Shia…」

「Eh, eh? What are you saying so suddenly? I felt something unpleasant in those words…」

Hearing the sudden encouragement with an odd atmosphere, Shia rubbed her arms as an expression of her bad feeling. For some time, Shia had been turning about restlessly as they moved forward.

Even now they had not seen a single demon. Though they considered the possibility of this Labyrinth not having any demons in it, that would be far too optimistic. It would not be strange if they suddenly appeared, since that, too, would be a trap.

They reached an open space after leaving the passageway. Inside the room, there were three more paths; Hajime placed a “mark” and chose the leftmost passage that led to a stair going down.

「Uu～ I have a bad feeling about this. Look at my rabbit ears, moving so restlessly.」

After advancing a few steps down, Shia blurted those words out. Just as she said, her rabbit ears were standing upright and moving

left and right.

「Don’t raise any strange flags now. If you say something like that, usually something immediately 『Gakon』… See!」

「Th, that’s not my fault, is it!?」「!? … Flag rabbit!」

While Hajime and Shia were talking, an unpleasant sound rang. The stairs suddenly disappeared, turning into a ramp. Furthermore, a tar-like slippery liquid overflowed from countless small holes on the surface.

「Ku, this is!」

Hajime immediately used Transmute on the base of his shoes to turn them into spikes. The fingers on his left hand also became spikes which he used to prevent himself from slipping. Yue, too, braced herself. As expected, the two were in harmony, even in this place.

However, there was one person unable to cooperate to that level. Obviously, that person was Shia.

「Ukyaaa!?」

Shia screamed as she hit the back of her head and writhed in pain, slipping along the coated surface. With her legs open

wide, she collided with Hajime’s face. 「Bu!?」

The spikes on his artificial arm lost their traction from the impact, throwing Hajime backward with his left arm holding Yue. The spikes on his shoes also gave way, and he slid down the slope headfirst. Shia was still on top of Hajime as they fell.

「Damn it! You clumsy rabbit! Move!」「I'm sorry～ But if I move now～」

As they slid down, their speed only grew faster. Hajime desperately stabbed the spikes in his arm and shoes on the ground, but they were going too quickly. He tried to use Transmutate on the stairs, but with the strong dispersion, it did not turn out well.

Shia, whilst struggling, was somehow able to get up. She was now riding Hajime.

「Use Drücken's stake!」

Hajime gave Shia instructions. Drücken had a few tricks prepared, one of which was a stake on the head of the hammer. It was a mechanism used to increase its penetration by focusing power in a single spot. They may have been able to stop if that spike was stabbed into the surface.

「Y, yes, leave it to me!? Hajime-san! The path—!」

Shia tried to remove Drücken from its fastener on her back; Shia immediately raised an uneasy voice when she looked forward.

Hajime realized what happened. When Shia slipped, it likely fell.

「! Yue!」「Yes!」

Hajime immediately called out Yue's name. With that alone, Yue could read Hajime's intent.

「Shia, hold on tight!」「Y, yes!」

Shia tightly clung to him.

Finally, they reached the end of the slope and were thrown in the air. After a moment of weightlessness, Yue invoked her magic.

「"Soar!"」

It was a Beginner Rank Wind Magic. It created a strong vertical updraft and aided with jumping power. An expert would be able to achieve pseudo-flight; however, it was difficult to maintain here. For that reason, Yue's magic lasted only a few seconds and could only help the three float.

「That's enough.」

Hajime's voice was mixed with praise. Hajime had enough time to check the surroundings. Yue had completely met his expectations.

With Yue in his left arm and Shia clinging to his neck, Hajime aimed his arm to the ceiling and poured magic into it… Pashu! Along with the sound came a thin wire with an anchor at the tip. It pierced the ceiling and was fixed in place by the anchor.

They were now hanging by that single wire, relieved that the

anchor did not get dislodged. They were then regretful seeing what was beneath them.

Kasa Kasa Kasa, Washa Washa Washa, Ki Ki, Kasa Kasa Kasa. Countless scorpions, 10 centimeters in length, were below them.

Though they were not like the scorpion demon, they still created a psychological disgust. If they did had not stopped their fall, they would have fallen into the sea of scorpions.

Everyone had goosebumps just thinking of it.

「「「…」」」

The three fell silent. They looked upward, not wanting to look down below. They then noticed some characters made by small lights The three inadvertently read it.

“They don’t have any lethal poisons.” “But you’ll be paralyzed.”

“Please be satisfied with sleeping with these cute children, Pugyaa!!”

She had purposely set up the Phosphorous Ore there. Those who fell would surely have the scorpions crawling all over them as they desperately tried to reach out to the sky. They would then

discover these playful words.

「「「…」」」

Once again, Hajime and the girls fell silent. 「Ignore it, ignore it,」 they told themselves as they observed the surroundings.

「… Hajime, over there.」 「Hm?」

Yue pointed at something she noticed below. There was an empty tunnel.

「A tunnel… What should we do? Will we climb back up or go down there?」

「I, I'll follow Hajime-san's decision. I've been nothing but a burden, after all…」

「No need. The punishment will come from the Labyrinth, so don't mind it.」

「That only makes me more anxious! Isn't it better to just leave it with 『Don't mind it!』」

「… Impertinent. Punishment twice.」

「Wha, you too, Yue-san!? Uu, even if we get through this Labyrinth, my future looks dark.」

Hajime and Yue forgave the lamenting Shia.

「Haa, well, it would be best if we could use that "Premonition" of yours～」

「Uu, that's still a bit… though I've been practicing… 」
"Premonition" — Shia's unique magic. She was able to

consciously catch a glimpse of the future based on certain assumptions; however, it could only be used once a day, and it was impractical because it required large amounts of magic power to use. Even if Shia specialized in body strengthening, her power would simply be drained by its use. Though training had decreased her consumption… she was still a long way from mastering it.

「Well, can't be helped. Rather than going back, we should probably move on, so let's go into the tunnel. 」

「… Mm. 」 「Okay. 」

Hajime shot out another anchor and swung like Tarzan until they safely reached the tunnel.

The passage was lined with Phosphorous Ore, leading deep inside. Since there were no branches, they simply moved forward. Compared to strange twists and turns, this was more suspicious. It was clearly due to Mildy's malicious nature.

They advanced for hundreds of meters through a passage with regular stonework and lights at set intervals, driving their sense of distance mad.

Hajime felt bad, as if this was simply a sign of something worse to come. He eventually saw a large room in front of t hem. Though he felt something would be in there, he did not hold back and entered the room… Gakon, a similar sound effect.

「This time… the ceiling is falling!」「… Shia.」

「Y, yes!」

Everyone looked ahead, and, as Hajime said, the ceiling was falling. Though it was a classic trap, in this area where it was remarkably difficult to use magic, it was a foul of a trap.

Rather, if someone were looking down the hall at the room, it would seem like the room had suddenly disappeared. There would not have been a single crack, and the passage would only seem like a dead end.

Silence.

The ceiling had fallen on the entire room, and it would have crushed the three of them if they were inside. They could only silently look back.

After a few minutes, the three found themselves facing a passage on the other side. Bright crimson sparks shot out as a hole the size of a person was carved through the ceiling. Obviously, the three had been crawling through there.

「Zehaa, Zehaa, H, hurry up.」

「… Mm, troublesome to be crushed by this.」

「I don't think that was at the level where you'd simply be troubled, right? You'd normally die, wouldn't you?」

There was no other path, and they did not have much time to pass through. Hajime and Shia were supporting the ceiling with their strength while Hajime transmuted a small tunnel in the ceiling.

Still, transmutation was hard to use with the strong magic dispersal; his speed was a quarter of the norm, the range was only 1 meter, and his consumption had multiplied tenfold. Even so, they could only stick close together and move slowly as Hajime created a small space for them to travel through.

He recalled trying to transmute the walls and ceilings back when he first fell into the Abyss… remembering this, Hajime grew more irritated, his tone growing more violent.

「Shit, I'm just a damn excavator here. Even "High Speed Magic Recovery" is useless. I'm not get much back at all.」

「… Do you want to drink… recovery potion for now?」「Now then, drink until you're full~」

「You two are too composed…」

Hajime, tired, leaned against the wall. Yue looked as if she were feeding someone chocolate while Shia retrieved a recovery potion from her pouch. Though it was possible to use the Magic Crystal Series to replenish his magic, he wanted to preserve it. Furthermore, it was more appropriate to use a normal potion in this

situation.

Hajime could not respond in any way and simply received the potion and drank it immediately. Hajime could feel the difference in speed and quantity of magic recovered compared to the Magic Crystal Series, but he could still feel a significant increase in his vitality. 「All right!」 he psyched himself up and stood.

Once again, they discovered annoying words.

“Pu pu, in a hurry～ How lame～”

Mildy Raisen… was a person who put in a lot of effort just to harass someone.

「Ah, we’re not in a hurry! Definitely not! We’re not that lame!」 Having traced Hajime’s gaze, Shia grumbled in protest. Shia’s

hostility toward Mildy had already reached the heavens. She reacted every time she read any of these words. Most likely, if Mildy was still alive, she would have grinned and thought,

「Good prey is here!」

「Ignore it, let’s go. Don’t mind it every time you see it.」 「… Will keep it in mind.」

「Uu, fine.」

Afterward, they advanced down the passage and reached more trap rooms. Poisoned arrows came from every direction, an acidic liquid

which melted anything dropped down, and there was also a room with floors which turned into something similar to an antlion nest with a worm-like demon at the center. Every time, the annoying words were presented, bringing the groups' stress levels to the limit.

Even so, they managed to pass through, arriving at the largest passage in the Labyrinth they had encountered so far. It was about 6 or 7 meters wide, and it gradually sloped and curved to the right, descending in a spiral shape.

The three remained vigilant. This passage way would definitely have traps in it.

After a while, their thoughts proved right. 「Gakon!」they heard. They had not stepped on or pressed any switches. You didn't need to use switches before! Hajime thought; surely Mildy Raisen would have been happy to hear that.

What kind of trap is it now? The three thought while examining the surroundings. Then they heard something.

Goro goro goro goro goro goro goro goro goro.

It was the sound of something heavy rolling down.

「「「…」」」

The three silently looked at each other then up above them. They could not see anything because of the curved slope. The strange noise grew louder, then…

A giant boulder rolled down. The rock was a large sphere; it was a

standard trap. After they desperately ran away, the annoying sentences would surely be there.

Yue and Shia had already began running, but they stopped because Hajime had not moved.

「… Mm, Hajime?」

「Hajime-san!? Hurry up or we'll be crushed!」

The two called out to him, but Hajime did not respond. He knelt down and extended his right hand forward. His palm was facing the large ball. Finally, he drew his left arm back to its limit and activated a mechanism within.

Hajime watched the sphere approach, his lips in a fierce smile.

「I won't follow your expectations every time! It doesn't fit my nature at all!」

「Kiiii!」 a loud sound could be heard from his artificial arm. Then…

Gogaann!!! A large sound of something being destroyed was emitted when Hajime's arm met the ball. The boulder had pushed Hajime back a little bit thanks to his spikes, while Hajime's attack crushed the sphere. It was cracked all over, and its force had been dispersed.

「Raaaa!!」

Hajime shook his left fist as he roared. Because his fist barely surpassed the durability of the boulder, the boulder began crumbling. A thunderous sound resounded as it shattered into small fragments.

Hajime drew back his fist while shaking it. The mechanism could be heard no longer. Hajime looked at his arm to check for any abnormalities, opening and closing his hand. He then turned to Yue and Shia.

「I did it!」his expression said, truly refreshed. Hajime could not deal with his stress any more.

What Hajime used this time was the same attack that defeated one of Felbergan's elders. It was a combination of "Strong Arm" and the explosive recoil of a projectile. Furthermore, he used a vibration magic with his artificial arm to crush the boulder. Because of the burden, he could not use it often. It was something of a last resort… but he could no longer endure, so he used it.

Hajime, satisfied, was greeted by the excited Yue and Shia.

「Hajime-san~! As expected of you! That was so cool! So neat!」
「… Mm, neat.」

「Ha ha ha, of course, of course. Now, the path…」

Hajime wanted to respond to their praise, but his words were interrupted.

Goro goro goro goro goro goro goro goro

They could hear the sound again. Hajime stiffened. Shia's smile also froze while Yue's expressionless face twitched. Hajime turned

around like a machine that had not been oiled, and what greeted him was…

— A large metallic ball which shined with a black luster. 「No way.」

Hajime inadvertently muttered to himself.

「Umm, Hajime-san. It might just be my imagination, but it looks like there's a strange liquid coming out of it, too…」

「… Melting.」

The large metallic ball was scattering a liquid which created small holes on the surface of the walls.

After confirming that, Hajime let out a breath and faced Yue and Shia with a smile. 「Let's run! Damn it!」 he shouted, and immediately ran down the slope. Yue and Shia looked at each other and chased after him promptly.

Behind them, they could hear the sound of metal scraping against stone as well as the walls being dissolved, its speed gradually increasing.

「Nooo! I don't want to be melted~!」 「… Run for now.」

Shia's lamenting words echoed through the passage.

「Rather, Hajime-san~! It's mean to run ahead of us! Cold-hearted! Devil!」

Shia protested as Hajime ran ahead of them.

「You're noisy! It's within the margin of error, the margin of error! Just shut up and run!」

「What's with that excuse! You don't care if anything happens to me, do you!? Uwaaa~ I'll come haunt you if I die!」

「… Shia, surprisingly calm?」

Even while desperately running away, Shia was able to complain firmly. Yue was amazed by it.

They finally saw the end of the passage which he had confirmed with "Far Sight." It was large and spacious; however, what he saw was a little strange. He could not see the floor of the room, no matter how long he looked. Perhaps the exit was on top of the ceiling.

「We're descending!」「Mm!」「Yes!」

The three slid as they passed into the next room, descending to the exit. Then,

「Geh!?」「Mm!?」

「Hin!?」

The three groaned. Right beneath the exit was a pool filled with an obviously dangerous liquid.

「That bastard!」

Hajime immediately shot out many knives and the anchor in his left arm and used his right to catch Yue.

At the same time, the metallic ball scattering an acid flew overhead and fell into the pool, sinking as it smoked.

「— “Wind Wall.”」

Yue used her magic to disperse the corrosive liquid. For a while, they simply watched the surroundings. Hajime finally relaxed when nothing happened.

「Gusu, Hic, why just me… I… Uu, Gusu.」

Shia could be heard crying to the side. She had been pinned to the wall with several knives.

「? Why are you crying?」「… Emotionally unstable?」

「You can tell just by looking at me! Why did you only hold Yue-san gently while you crucified me! Hajime-san～ Please, can’t you treat me even a little nicely?」

「Didn’t I save you?」

「That's not what I mean! I want to be saved more like a girl… You understand, right? I want to be held, just like Yue-san!」

「… Shia.」

「Gusu, what is it, Yue-san?」「… Look at reality.」

「What does that mean!?」

「You know, Shia, you're our companion, and that's how I'll treat you… Yue is the one I love in the end, so it can't be helped if

my body moves on reflex, right?」「Uu～」

After giving a justifiable complaint and hearing a justifiable response, Shia, while stuck to the wall, could be seen with tears in her eyes. When he said「The one I love,」Yue blushed and held Hajime closely, rubbing her cheek against his chest.

「I'll definitely～ make you fall for me and have you hold me like that!」

「Quite a spirited one～」

「… Spirited… I'll pay attention.」

Beneath them was a pool of corrosive liquid. Hajime and the girls were continuing on with their love comedy despite the situation.

Using the anchor, they moved like a pendulum until they landed on some ground past the pool.

They were in a large rectangular room with 2 meter tall knight armors lining each wall. The armors had large swords and shields; further down the room was a stairwell. Before that was a double-door with an altar which gave off a solemn aura. On the altar was a diamond shaped yellow crystal.

Hajime frowned.

「That's quite a door. Is it Mildy's hobby? Also… is it just me, or do those suits of armor give off a bad feeling?」

「… It's fine. They'll attack us.」

「They'll attack us? Isn't that not okay at all, then?」

The three advanced toward the center of the room. Sure enough, it was as expected. A familiar sound could be heard.

Gakon!

Everyone came to a halt. 「Like we thought～」they all said. From the helmets, lights could be seen shining, and sounds of metal rubbing against metal could be heard as the knights moved.

They were fifty in number.

The knights raised their shields and brandished their greatswords, ready to pierce, as they surrounded the three and lowered their

waist.

「Ha ha, it really did happen. We probably should have destroyed them before we started moving. Well, too late for that… Yue,

Shia, shall we?」「Mm.」

「A, Aren't there too many ? Well, I'll fight anyway… 」

Hajime pulled out Donner & Schlag. Though Metzelei would be more effective against these numbers, he did not know how many traps were in the room. The barrage of bullets could very well trigger all of them, so he chose to stick with his two rail guns.

Yue responded to Hajime with a yell filled with her fighting spirit. She understood she had the least firepower in this Labyrinth; however, she refused to be a burden. As Hajime's partner, she would not lose here. Even more so from now on; she had a rival in love now, so she did not want to show any weakness.

Shia lowered her waist. She had the least in terms of influence here, but she was not the weakest in power. She knew her battle experience was severely insufficient, though. She had fought against demons in the canyon for 5 days. Even if she included the 10 days of training with Yue, she only had a little over 2 weeks of experience. Since she also came from the Haulia Family, known for its kindness, it was impossible for her to have a solid resolution in battle; rather, it was quite a statement that she was able to wield Drücken before her enemies.

「Shia.」

「Y, yes! Wh, what is it, Hajime-san? 」

Shia was nervous. His voice was kinder than usual… or perhaps that was her imagination.

「You're strong. We guarantee it. You won't lose against these golems. Don't ever think you're weak. If it becomes dangerous, I'll come to help.」

「… Mm, it's my job to take care of my apprentice.」

Hearing Hajime and Yue, Shia almost began to cry. She was happy. She had thought she was a burden, she was uneasy… but it was a needless anxiety.

An amateur should do what an amateur can do. Shia used body strengthening and firmly stomped on the ground.

「Fu fu, Hajime-san is so nice now. I'm motivated now! Yue-san, the day I surpass you will soon come!」

「「… Don't get carried away.」」

Though Hajime and Yue responded in amazement, Shia, her tension at its peak, heard nothing. She looked straight ahead and glared at the knights.

「Here I come!」

「No, like I said before, how do you know that material… Ah, she's gone.」

「… Daa～」

「… I won't say anything. I definitely won't say anything.」 With fifty golem knights before him, Hajime had an exhausted

expression before he even began fighting. As if understanding his mental state… the golem knights all attacked at once.

The golem knights were agile despite their large frame. Gasha Gasha, they sounded as they rapidly approached, giving off an intense force alongside their weapons. It was as if walls were closing in on all directions.

Hajime aimed at the golem knights. Though he had two rail guns in his hand, he could not put out his normal fire power. Even so, they were still more powerful than a real rifle, so he shot them at the golem knights.

Two flashes of light, two golem knights were hit in their head; to be precise, it was their eyes that were shot. The knights fell back from the impact. When the next set of knights drew near, Hajime lightly jumped up and shot many times in rapid succession, throwing the lethal encirclement into disarray.

Having endured Hajime's storm of gunfire with their shields, swords, and bodies of their companions, several knights finally drew near to the three.

Even so, that was within the killing range of the blue-gray haired Shia Haulia. She set up her hammer and brought it down, clearing

everything away.

「Deyaaa!!」

With a shout, she brought down Drücken, with a tremendous impact as one of the golem knights was flattened. Though the knight had set up its shield, its defenses were still bypassed.

There were cracks and a crater in the ground caused by Drücken. She had released her attack with all her might. Another knight set up its shield to endure the shock wave while trying to cut Shia in two.

Shia confirmed its movements out of the corner of her eye and twisted the handle, adjusting the angle of Drücken's head, then pulled the trigger.

An explosive sound came from Drücken as a cartridge flew in the air by Shia's side. Using the momentum, Shia rotated and delivered a powerful blow to the Knight's flank.

「Raaa!!」

She shouted energetically, The knight bent over, as if hit by a speeding truck, and rolled back, hitting the approaching knights. Its body, unable to stop itself, was flattened with no sign of movement.

Hyun Hyun! The sound of wind reached Shia's rabbit ears. When she took a look, a great sword was rotating in midair as the former golem knight had let it go when Shia sent it flying.

Shia jumped up and grabbed it and threw it with all her might at an oncoming golem knight.

The sword flew quickly, colliding with the knight's shield, causing it to flip upward. Not missing this chance, Shia swung Drücken from below, blowing the knight into the air. Though it tried to hit Shia on its way up, Shia used Drücken to block it before hitting it from below.

Just like the earlier one, the golem knight was blown away like a cannonball.

Shia smiled. It was not like she felt pleasure from fighting; she was only happy to be able to fight properly. She would be able to continue traveling with Hajime and Yue. At this moment, she was distracted.

This was fatal on the battlefield. By the time she noticed, many knight shields had been drawn and approached. The golem knights had decided to throw their shields at her. With the golem knights' power, the shields flew with extraordinary power. Though it was not fatal against Shia's body strengthening, it could cause a concussion, which would lead to an easily foreseeable conclusion.

Even if they were golems, they were still knights, so why throw away the shield? Still, they had drawn a beautiful arc, and Shia had no room to even call out.

Shia readied herself to endure the incoming attacks when a laser-like water current hit the shields before they came into contact with her, changing their trajectories. The shields passed by Shia's head and crashed into the golem knights behind her.

「… Being unprepared is the greatest enemy. Three times punishment.」

「Fue!? Was that Yue-san just now? I, I'm sorry, thank you! Wait, three times the punishment!?」

「Mm… No daydreaming.」 「R, right! I'll do my best!」

Yue scolded her; Shia, too, was conscious of her carelessness. She braced herself while reflecting. Once more, she tried to defeat an approaching golem knight. With help from a water laser, a golem knight trying to sneak an attack on Shia from behind was cleanly cut in two.

Shia felt warm knowing Yue was protecting her back. She raised her fighting spirit so she would not show any further disgrace before her master.

The same water current flew at a knight going on a rampage in Shia's blind spot and cut it with a sharpness beyond a blade. What Yue had been using was the Intermediate Rank Water Magic, "Rupture." It was a water blade that fired moisture gathered from the air in an ultra high pressure stream.

In Yue's hands were large metallic water bottles as well as two more on her shoulder strap. Hajime had taken these out of "Treasure Warehouse" for her. Every time Yue muttered the magic name, a water blade would fly from the water bottles she held.

Though Yue could use the moisture in the air, she felt it would consume too much magic power to pressurize it from scratch, and by using the end of the water bottle to aim her attacks, she did not use magic for targeting.

Shia's explosive attack range was supported by Yue's water blades which covered her blind spots. The knights were incapable of breaking their combination; one by one, they were destroyed.

Hajime watched their splendid cooperation from the side and smiled wryly.

「Look, you can do it after all. I wonder if I'd be able to do that

well?」

While joking to himself, Hajime began to enter close combat with Donner & Schlag.

He warded off a descending sword with Schlag's barrel and shot its helm at point blank range with Donner. Without looking at the knight who flew backward, he warded off an attack from behind and fired without turning around. He squatted and turned to dodge swords swung at him, shooting at the knights from the side.

The shot, which did not use "Lightning Clad," ricocheted off the knight's shield and hit a nearby knight's knee, destroying its balance. He jumped up and fired at another nearby knight from above.

He parried the swords aimed at him with the back of his hands and fired whilst mid-air, destroying four knights' heads. As he landed, he took bullets from "Treasure Warehouse" and reloaded them before shooting them again. The surrounding knights were blown away.

One by one, without leaving a chance for even injury, the golem knights were slaughtered one by one. However…

「…?」

While countering the golem knights, Hajime raised his eyebrows in doubt. Though many golem knights had been destroyed, there was no change in the density of approaching attacks.

Yue and Shia also had their doubts. After careful observation, they finally realized the golem knights they had defeated were nowhere to be seen.

「… Replication?」「Looks like it.」

「It can't be! Then this won't end at all!」

It seemed the moment the golem knights were destroyed and lost a glint in their eyes, more knights with new bodies came, joining the ranks.

Shia cried out in panic while mowing down the approaching knights. It was reasonable enough since, no matter how many she defeated, there was no meaning.

On the contrary, Hajime and Yue remained calm. They showed no sign of impatience as they kicked around the golem knights. Perhaps this was the difference in their experience. They had experienced this numerous times in the Abyss. Rather, they had room to spare.

「… Hajime, a golem must have a core.」

Just as Yue said, it was normal for a golem to have a core within its body, and that core was its source of power. The core was made using demon magic cores. It was written on the blueprint of Oscar's cleaning golem. Yue was telling him that they needed to destroy the cores.

However, Hajime had a bitter expression understanding Yue's proposal.

「Nothing else to say. They don't have a core at all.」「… Really?」

「Yeah, I've confirmed it with my Evil Eye. There's no mistake about it. Though I found some suspicious magic power in the golems…」

「So it's like that after all! This is bad if it keeps up」

Shia called out impatiently once again. Hajime ignored her shout and used "Mineral Investigation" on the golems that operated without a core. He had thought they may have been made with a special stone of some sort.

He was spot on.

＝＝＝

Destroyed golems simply needed to add on parts for those that were lacking; it was closer to reconstruction than replication.

Upon closer examination, the floor was made with this Induction Stone, and there were parts that were carved away. Those areas had likely been used to replenish the bodies of the golems. Without defeating the controller, this would truly be endless.

「Yue, Shia, there's something controlling them. It's seriously

endless like this, so let's break through!」「Mm!」

「B, break through? Okay!」

Under Hajime's signal, Yue and Shia immediately rushed out toward the altar. Hajime advanced using Donner & Schlag, rapidly firing at the knights to create a path as well as throwing two grenades toward those that approached from behind. The golem knights fell one after another. Shia advanced through the space Hajime made while spinning Drücken, mowing down the golem knights as she moved. The knights threw their shields and swords at Shia, only to have Yue's "Rupture" split them.

Hajime, whose duty it was to guard the rear, fired his rail guns in rapid succession at the golems approaching them. Using this opportunity, Shia passed through the encirclement and arrived at that altar. Yue jumped over the altar and reached the door.

「Yue-san! The door—!?」「Yeah… sealed after all.」「Auu, as expected!」

The suspicious altar and door was before their eyes. They had

thought it to be sealed which is why they originally thought it less troublesome to just slaughter the knights. Now, they needed to release the seal on the door. Shia, as usual, complained as knights flew in from the stairs.

「Yue, I leave the seal to you. It'll take too much time to break through with Transmute.」

Hajime stood beside Shia to watch her back. Just as Hajime said, forcibly using Transmute here might be possible, but it would consume large amounts of magic and time. Since they had finally reached the altar with the yellow crystal, it was faster to release the seal normally. For that reason, Hajime left Yue, who had bad magic consumption, to deal with the seal normally.

「Mm… Leave it to me.」

Yue readily accepted and immediately took the yellow crystal from the altar. It was a square pyramid shape and was made from combinations of solid blocks.

Yue looked at the door behind her. There were three indentations there. Yue thought for a while and began disassembling the pyramid, reassembling them into shapes that fit the indentations.

While assembling them, Yue kept an eye on the indentations, noticing small characters carved there.

"I wonder if you can solve it~ I wonder~ "You'll die if you don't do it fast, you know~

"Well, it can't be helped if you can't solve it! You're just a

normal human, unlike me!”

“Don’t worry! You’ll live even if you’re a bit stupid… not! Too bad~! Pugya—!”

As usual, there were many annoying sentences. Yue was truly irritated by them. With her usual flat expression, she focused on solving the puzzle, though she wanted to punch the door.

Somehow, Hajime and Shia could feel her anger from behind and could only curse in their minds while focusing on destroying the golem knights.

「Hajime-san~ Please use that Dopah thing, just like before~」
The golems swarmed in like a certain black creature scuttling

across the kitchen, which is why Shia begged Hajime to use a grenade.

「Idiot, I can only throw that when I’m sure there are no traps. If it’s thrown near the stairs, then you should know what could happen.

「Even though there are so many golems here?」

「It’s something that Mildy Raisen made. Isn’t it likely the traps won’t react to the golems?」

「Uu, I can’t refute that…」

In a certain sense, Hajime and Shia were only playing around with the golem knights as they made idle talk. In the beginning, Shia was truly impatient, but, seeing how calm Hajime and Yue were, she calmed down.

「But it made me a bit happy.」「Ahh?」

Again, while smashing a golem and sending it flying with a kick, Shia blurted out something random.

「Just a while ago, I could only run away, but now I can fight together with Hajime-san… I'm really happy.」

「… You really are a curious one.」

「E he he, I'll finally be able to flirt with Hajime-san after we conquer this Labyrinth!」

「Hey, you. How did you get that far? That's the same as raising the death flag. Being a tragic heroine is too much for you, so stop it. Also, I really can't say it well, but how do you know this material?」

「What was it, 『I definitely won't let you die, My Honey ☆』 Really, Hajime-san!」

「You're twisting things too much! I was afraid of how positive you could be before, but… I really don't know what to say, now…」

The chatted for several minutes while repelling the knights. In a way, the two seemed to be flirting. 「Nuu～」A shadow appeared; it was Yue.

「… Flirting is forbidden.」「It was nothing like that.」

「Nu fu fu, is that what it looks like? How embarrassing～」「It'd be better if you just shut up…」

Hajime looked at Shia with an exhausted expression then turned to Yue who was displeased. However, she showed a bit of a proud expression, as if she had done something great.

「… Open.」

「Fast, as expected of you, Yue. Shia, fall back!」「Yes!」

Hajime took a glance behind him, and, as Yue said, the seal had been released. There was nothing unusual inside the room. After telling Shia to withdraw, he retreated to the room. The golem knights would not chase after them if they closed the door. Yue was the first to enter the room, then Shia who jumped in. The two took a door each to close it.

Hajime threw several grenades and dived into the room. Thought the golems rushed in after the three escaped, they were pushed back by the strong impact of the grenades. Without missing that chance, Yue and Shia closed the door.

Hajime used "Far Sight" in the room to confirm that there was

nothing there at all. It was not even Mildy Raisen's room, but there may have been some kind of clue which would lead to it. While thinking that originally, they quickly lost their momentum.

「It's that, isn't it? Even though there was such an elaborate seal, there's nothing inside, is it that kind of prank?」

「… It can't be.」

「Uu, Mildy, how much do you want to make fun of us!」 The three fell because that very possibility was the most likely.

Suddenly, they heard a familiar and unpleasant sound.

Gakon!

「「「!?」」」

Along with the sound, a mechanism began operating, and the room trembled. At that time, some G forces assaulted the three from the side. Yue bit her tongue and Shia fell over like a frog, suppressing her watery eyes as the odd change in gravitational force hit them.

「!? What happened!? Did the room just move!?」「… Looks like it!?」

「Ukya!?」

The moment Hajime began speaking, G forces came from above. Because of the radical change, Yue bit her tongue again, covering her mouth with watery eyes, while Shia fell to the ceiling in a frog pose.

The room continued changing several more times. After 40 seconds of ignoring the laws of inertia, it stopped.

Hajime was able to endure the impact of the sudden stop by affixing himself to the ground with his spiked shoes, while Shia, unable to endure it, rolled about, hitting her head against the wall. She rolled in every direction and screamed every time gravity changed directions. She looked as if she were drunk with a sharp pain in the back of her head. Since Yue was clinging to Hajime's body, she had no problems at all.

「Fuu～ Finally stopped… Yue, are you okay?」「… Mm, no problem.」

Hajime retracted the spikes and stood up. There were no changes when he observed the surroundings. Considering the movements, they were connected to a different place.

「H, Hajime-san, why no words for me?」

Shia covered her mouth with a blue face and stared at Hajime. She was unhappy that he had only asked Yue.

「Well, if I ask you as you are now, everything will flow in reverse… and you'll throw up and get Vomiting Rabbit as a new title. You don't want that, right?」

「Of course not! But I still wanted you to ask because I'm a maide–Upu.」

「See? It's better if you rest a little now.」「Uu, Upu.」

Leaving Shia, who was on all fours and ready to vomit, alone, Hajime and Yue looked at the surroundings. Finally, finding nothing, they faced the door.

「Now then, what should we do?」

「… Is the one who controlled it in there?」

「There is that possibility. Mildy should have died, though… so who moved those golems?」

「… No matter who, it will be fine. I will protect Hajime… Shia, too, I guess.」

「I can't hear you~ Upuu.」

Hajime smiled. Gently, with one hand, he stroked Yue's head. Yue, wanting to be spoiled more, closed in with narrow eyes.

「… I know I said this before, could you please stop suddenly entering your own world, you two? I always feel so lonely, Uupu.」

Shia expressed her feelings of 「Don't leave me out!」while crawling on all fours and enduring her nausea.

「… I know I said this before, but everything will come out at this rate, so could you stop with the horror flick movements? I'd rather

not see it in my dreams.」

「Th, that's good. To be beside you even just a little is a maiden's dream, upuu, I also want to be patted like Yue-san. Please hold me and pat me! Ueee.」

「Saying that with a face that looks like it's about to vomit… and to casually add on your own demands to boot.」

「… Still too early for Shia to be pet by Hajime.」

Shia came up to Hajime and Yue by her own willpower, looking at Hajime with expectant eyes and a pale face. Hajime quickly averted his gaze and looked at the door. 「Why! Ueeepu,」 he could hear, but he ignored it.

On the other side of the door would be Mildy's dwelling, the controller of the golems, or another trap… 「Come at me, whatever you are,」 Hajime thought as he opened the door with a fearless smile. There was…

「… Have we seen this before? This room.」 「… Definitely, especially that lithograph.」

Beyond the door was another room with a lithograph and a passage at the left side of the room. They had memories of this room, because it was…

「This is… the first room, right?」

Even if she said that, Shia did not want to think it true; however, as she had said, the lithograph had the annoying sentences carved into it, just like those in the first room. There was a difference, though. After a few seconds, the door opened and new characters floated.

“Hey, how do you feel right now?”

“Even though you went through so many hardships, you’re back at the starting point; how do you feel?”

“Hey, hey, how do you feel? What kind of emotions do you

have? Hmm?

「「「…」」」

The expression on everyone’s face fell. Their expressions truly fit that of a “Noh Mask.” The three watched as the characters silently and smoothly moved. Additional characters began to appear.

“Ah, I forgot to say this. This Labyrinth will change at regular intervals.”

“As usual, it’s Mildy-chan’s thoughtfulness so you can enjoy the Labyrinth with a new feeling every time.”

“Are you happy? You’re happy, right? There’s no need to reward me! I’m only doing it because I like it, after all!”

“By the way, because it always changes, mapping is useless.”

“Don’t tell me, did you make one? You went through all that hardship? Too bad! Pugyaa!!”

「Ha, ha ha ha.」「Fu fu fu fu.」

「Fu hi, Fu hi hi hi.」

The three let out different types of broken laughter.

Afterward, needless to say, their screams echoed throughout the entirety of the Labyrinth. After passing through the first hallway, as Mildy had said, the stairs had been greatly altered as well as the corridors past them. Once again, their resentful voices could be heard due to the structure of the place.

Afterward, they rebuilt their spirit and began trekking through the Labyrinth, but it did not go smoothly, especially for Shia who seemed to trigger them frequently (including a gold basin, bird lime, shots of liquid with an odd smell.)

Needless to say, Shia went berserk.

Chapter 4

In a corner of the Palace in 【Hairihi Kingdom,】in a dining room used exclusively by the students summoned from another world. A chamber maid whose sole job was to tend to the students looked about to meet any demand at any time. Even food and drink could be prepared immediately.

Keeping the rooms in a single room was a terrible thing, since it would lead to them shutting themselves in and wallowing in solitude save for some exceptions, so most spent their free time in this room chatting to one another.

Of course, they were not invited to this world to remain idle. They were the war potential who would represent Humans in their fight against Devils.

So why did the majority of them waste time chatting in this room in the middle of the day… simply put, it was because their hearts were broken.

The students, several months ago, witness death. In the depths of 【Orcus Great Labyrinth】where the light of day does not reach, full of murderous intent from demons who show no mercy, they were near death and could not overcome it; one student had actually died, never to be seen again.

— A fantasy of sword and magic.

This thought had danced through their minds as they held new dreams and hopes, but the overwhelming reality, the irrationality of the world easily surpassed their expectations, crushing them. If they go out on the battlefield, they will die. This was natural, and such a common truth was carved into their flesh and bones.

Practicing magic, seeing one's talent grow, feeling pleasure from destroying demons. These feelings were not present in the least. Any one amongst them could die. Now that they understood this, it was impossible to fight, no, they were having trouble leaving the Capital.

Naturally, the upper echelons of the Kingdom and the Saint Church have urged them to fight. However, they did not take forcible measures. Rather, they were trying to persuade the students. The students were mentally cornered, and the thought of being driven out began nestling in their minds. Without the protection here, they would be thrown into a cruel world where life was light.

At that time, the teacher and only adult summoned with the class, someone with a rare class — Hatayama Aiko — moved about to various places in order to solve food problems.

When Aiko returned, she heard about the boy who did not return and grew confused. However, seeing the students, she stood up. She took a firm attitude and negotiated with all her might, eventually persuading the top tiers from their persuasion.

As a result, the students did not need to go to battle; it was a promise from the Palace, and so they spent their time idly having chats.

「Hey, did you hear? Amanogawa and them, they reached Floor 70.」

「Seriously? They just reached the 66th Floor which hadn't been mapped.」

「It's the Hero Party, right? Ordinary people like us really are different from them.」

One boy — Tamai Atsushi — shrugged his shoulders with a complicated expression. Did he envy their strength? They narrowly escaped from death, but Kouki's party still continued challenging demons, going to lands untrodden. At the same time, he felt miserable with himself, feeling awkward that he was looking away whenever he recalled that day which rooted a fear deep inside.

It was not limited to Tamai Atsushi alone; the majority of the students in the room were the same.

They wanted to return to Japan, to their homes. They wanted to win the war against Devils, but to do that, they needed the power of God Eht who summoned them to Tortus as well as the Saint Church which believed in him. Even if they understood this, they could not get build the motivation. There was a d ark fear which painted over their pure will.

「Right. Like I thought, Kaori-chan, Shizuku-chan, they really are special.」

「Right, right. Shizukuchi is seriously cool, too. I need to be careful or I'll fall in love~」

「A ha ha, what's with that~ We have enough of that with Suzu alone!」

「Eh, Suzu- chan, she's one of those!?」「No, she's just an old man inside.」

Similar to Atsushi and the boys, the girls were joking happily on the surface despite their sense of guilt inside. Still, they continued talking without any real meaning to it. They were afraid the conversation would come to an end.

Seeing this, the chamber maid had an emotionless gaze d espite the various emotions in him. They were chosen by God, and it was meaningless for them to spend their time here, but fear ate away at their minds. He also felt pity for these children who were summoned here without their consent with no means of returning home. As for abandoning them, he was not entirely indifferent…

These children, without their families, without relation to the country, were simply a group of juveniles. The chamber maid himself simply felt like a caretaker at this point. It was all a matter of position.

The air remained. They continued their dry conversations, licking their wounds in their escapism.

Suddenly, a small voice sounded in the room.

「… Shizuku-sama, that girl is no different from you…」 Perhaps the chamber maid, Nia had spoken to herself, but the

timing was bad, and everyone in the room heard, interrupting all conversations.

The students were startled and turned th eir gaze to Nia. Nia clearly blurted her words out on impulse and lowered her head to apologize.

「… What, you have a complaint?」

Atsushi frowned a groaned quietly as he looked at Nia. The atmosphere had turned more hostile. Having reality thrust at them, he spoke up at Nia.

「No. It is not a complaint. I apologize.」

Nia bowed to the students once again. However, Atsushi was irritated by her admirable attitude and spoke in annoyance.

「You don’t need to apologize to anyone. Don’t make fun of us! So what if Yaegashi-san no different from us… In short, we who aren’t fighting aren’t changing, either, and we’re miserable! Say it clearly!」

「H, hey. Atsushi… leave it at that.」 「She’s just the maid.」

Atsushi, who was yelling like a child, was stopped by his friends, Aikawa Noboru and Nimura Akito.

「Shut it. I just… just… shit…」 「Atsushi…」

「Tamai-kun…」

The depressed emotions swirled within him, exposing his anxiety. Aikawa and Akito to his side had nothing to say. They looked away from him, as did some of the school girls. Everyone understood. The words he could not say were the heavy cobwebs which bound them.

Atsushi looked down, his expression hidden; Nia advanced one step.

「Atsushi-sama, I apologize for my earlier remark. It was not a remark I said in sarcasm. Please, I simply…」

「Nia-san… no, um, I just… I'm sorry…」

Hearing Nia's apology and seeing her sincere attitude, Atsushi averted his gaze, returning an apology in kind. In truth, this woman was not at fault. The two simply ended it with an apology.

Seeing Atsushi like this, Nia smiled lightly, intending to speak her true thoughts.

「Everyone, I apologize for my careless remark. However, I, not as

a chamber maid, but as a friend, which to say something. Shizuku-sama also needs someone to defend her, someone to rely on. She is a girl that others depend on too much.」

「… But Shizuku is really strong. She's always reliable… Honestly, I can't imagine her being weak at all.」

「That's right…」

The first girl to speak up — Miyazaki Nana — smiled wryly; her friend, Sugawara Taeko, agreed.

「Certainly, if you go to her, she will take care of you and not show any weakness. But no person is perfect. Shizuku -sama is also a girl, a normal student in her teens, just like you. She is fine now, but… when she returns to the Palace, I do not believe she has room to relax, either. Everyone says it is natural for Shizuku- sama to be able to do things, but isn't she cornered because of this? I feel uneasy.」

「Nia-san…」

Nana and Atsushi were shaken by these remarks.

Since Nia had been appointed to this job, she had been closest to Shizuku. She, too, had been surrounded by h er father and elder brothers, learning swordsmanship from an early age; having similar circumstances, the two got along well. Though Nia was tense seeing as Shizuku was an Apostle of God, she could say without difficulty that they were friends now. T hat was why she worried about her friend from a different world who was challenging areas never before seen by others. She felt these students had too great of

expectations.

At that time, one girl who had not particularly participated in the conversation had a distant gaze as she sat down.

「We… really aren't any different… 」「Yuuka? What is it? Are you okay? 」

「You've been like this for a while… are you okay? 」

Taeko and Nana turned in surprise and worry to their friend, Sonobe Yuuka. Since that day when they narrowly escaped from death, Yuuka had been lacking any energy. She was normally a slightly strong-minded person with an outgoing personality, for better or for worse, a powerful girl with sharp words, but since then, she had simply sat in a chair in her room all day long looking at the sky if her friends did not pull her out. She was recognized as having some of the deepest mental trauma, so everyone was surprised to hear her speak on her own.

But the person in question seemed to stare into space, not hearing the words of her friends.

「… Right. Not just Shizuku-chan, Kaori-chan and Sakagami-kun, too, Nagayama-kun and them as well, Hiyama-kun, I'm sure Amanogawa-kun as well… they haven't changed. They're the same as usual… no, they're acting as usual. But… even though I'm the same… why… 」

Her words were somewhat fragmented after that, but they revealed

her feelings. Something inside Yuuka began to move.

Taeko and Nana were deeply concerned, but Yuuka seemed to have a light in her eyes once again as she looked into space. She then looked at the students, some confusion in her gaze.

「Nia-san. Is Ai-chan Sensei still here, or has she left?」

「Aiko-sama? I believe she will be leaving tomorrow morning. Her destination is 【Lake Town Ul,】and she should return in 2, 3 weeks.」

「Uwa, tomorrow… yeah, that might be good. I might not do it if it's any longer.」

Yuuka smiled bitterly hearing Nia's response and stood up from her chair. Her movements were strong, causing Taeko and Nana to stare at her. They had not seen their friend like this for some time now.

「W, wait, Yuukachi, what are you doing?」

「Eh, how should I put it, I just had a feeling. So I'm going with Aiko-chan tomorrow.」

Everyone was surprised by the decision Yuuka lightly reported. This was natural. She was the one with the largest mental trauma. Her eyes had been empty, spiritless, sometimes fearful… Yuuka had been this way since they returned to the Kingdom. They could not help but be confused seeing her return to her normal self.

「H, hey, Sonobe, are you serious? Is something wrong? Calm down for a bit.」

Atsushi returned to normal and spoke hastily. However,

「I'm fine, Tamai-kun. It isn't sudden, either… I can't stay like this forever. "He" is dead, I'm frightened, I don't know what to do, and I still feel dull… but I need to do something. Tamai-kun too, everyone as well, aren't we all the same?」

「…!」

Hearing Yuuka's words, Atsushi took a deep breath. He swallowed the words in his mouth. Everyone in class looked away awkwardly.

Seeing them waver, Yuuka simply shrugged her shoulders and began walking to the door.

「W, wait, Sonobe! Are you seriously going!? You really might die this time! It's not a movie or an anime, you know. Luck won't always be on your side. That, that's why he died! Even though he was incapable, he did something foolish, and he died because of it!! I, I, I can't do something stupid like him…

Sonobe, you need to calm down.」

Though Atsushi shouted intensely, he gradually lost strength and looked down. Seeing Atsushi, no, the entire class like this, Yuuka answered in a quiet voice without turning around.

「But that incapable, foolish person saved me. No, he saved all of us.」

「That,」

「I'm not saying you need to follow me, Tamai-kun. But I, I don't want to waste it. That's all. Of course, if there are more of us, I'd be happy.」

She turned her shoulder slightly, revealing a strong smile. Atsushi tried to speak but could find no words to say as he fell to the chair without any strength. Yuuka walked out of the room. Taeko and Nana were still stunned. Unlike the class which looked

down or seemed mortified, the two ran after Yuuka in a panic. They caught up to her in the hallway, unable to hide their confusion.

「Yuuka. Are you really going to follow Ai-chan Sensei? You really could die this time, you know?」

「I understand. But, like I thought, even though I don't have the courage Amanogawa-kun and the others have, I can at least guard Ai-chan.」

Seeing her firm gaze and hearing her strong voice, Taeko and Nana looked at each other. Then they timidly spoke to her.

「Yuukachi… um, could it be, about Nagumo…」

「What are you saying? Do I really have that simple a character?」
「Is that so?」

「Of course not. In the first place, Kaori-chan's been training herself hard, I'm sure she believes he's still alive. She's a hero in her own right. Even if I did, I'm not so bold as to do anything against that.」

「Well, that's…」

On that day when Hajime did not return from【Orcus Great Labyrinth,】Sonobe Yuuka was the girl saved from the Traum Soldier when on the verge of death. Therefore, Nana had always suspected Yuuka's emotions; she could not say they were feelings of love, but it was clear her emotions were incredibly complicated. Despite her curiosity, it was not to the extent that Nana would tease Yuuka about it.

There were no lies in Yuuka's words. She did not want to waste her life. This life he saved, she wanted to work hard. "No one has changed," surely that would be the same for Hajime as well. If she has not changed, then she should not stop moving, doing so would simply be a cruel betrayal to herself. She did not want to squander her life on her own.

The two lifelong friends sympathized with Yuuka's feelings, looked at each other, and nodded with a smile. Alongside her, the two also joined the expedition.

「… Is that okay? You don't particularly have to follow me.」

「Yuukachi, you said you didn't want to waste the life he saved. I don't want that either. If you're going, why can't I go?」

「That's right. We can't let Yuuka go alone. I'm also the same, I don't want to sit around doing nothing.」

Yuuka had been helped by Hajime, and she had finally returned from her stupor, straightening herself up. To some of the students, Taeko and Nana included, Yuuka's awakening was a turning point. Taeko and Nana knew that. If Yuuka was standing up, the two had no other choice.

「I see. Fufu, then we'll follow Ai- chan to protect her from demons and those pretty boy bodyguards the Church sent to follow her.」

Yuuka's two friends followed after her, responding in a playful manner. 「Oh～!」Nana and Taeko cried out in good spirits.

The fear nestling deep in the eyes of the three weakened from before as they all smiled as a new light dwelt inside.

Early in the morning, before sunrise, the cool air descended as the light of the sun rose from the east; there was one person there with a dull expression. That was the teacher, Hatayama Aiko.

She was the main role of the expedition today.

「… Everyone. Think about it, okay? The knights will be my guard.」

「No, Ai-chan Sensei. Rather, those knights are dangerous. Did you see? They're clearly dogs of the Saint Church who want to draw Ai-chan in.」

「That's right, Ai-chan Sensei. They're all pretty boys, you can't go with them, okay?」

「Well, it might be pointless since it's Ai-chan Sensei. But Ai-chan Sensei is ours, so we can't be too careful.」

Yuuka, Taeko, and Nana declared t hey wo uld follow Aiko after preparing last night, and hearing their words, Aiko could only droop her shoulders. She missed her chance to persuade them otherwise, and she thought it too dangerous to take them. No matter what she said now, it was useless.

As an aside, they were not being overly cautious of this being a honey trap laid by the Saint Church. Aiko traveled to do land reform throughout the Kingdom. It was normal to have a guard from the temple, but it was filled with pretty boys. It was as Taeko said; however, the plan itself had failed. For the same reason the students adored Aiko, the pretty boy guard were avid Aiko believers. Though she did not notice it herself, Aiko was like the hero from an otome game.

Though Aiko was worried about them, her task was still somewhat dangerous, so she held complex desires about having them travel with her. Before long, she heard a clamor coming from the Palace.

When Aiko looked, she saw the horse and carriage approaching. Unexpectedly, it was not just the knights coming with it, though.

「T, Tamai-kun? Aikawa-kun and Nimura-kun as well? It can't be, you…」

「Yeah, Ai-chan Sensei. Morning. Thanks for working with us.」 Atsushi lightly greeted Aiko before the pretty boy knight squadron

could say anything. Aiko tried to give some advice, but she was interrupted.

「… You're going? Honestly, it's a bit unexpected.」

「Shut it … You're not the only one. We're the same. Everyone else, too.」

「I see. Then lets work hard together.」

Yuuka shrugged her shoulders and accepted Atsushi's accompaniment. And so, the Ai-chan Security Force was born. Despite the fear and tension, they all seemed cheerful.

And before they left, one more student joined the Ai-chan Security Force, once again interrupting the knights.

「Uu, no one is listening to me again… I can't even persuade a single student. I'm a terrible teacher. Gusu.」

Aiko was downcast; needless to say, one of the guards tried to comfort her and was now writhing in pain as Yuuka stopped him. Thanks to Yuuka constantly sending out sparks, the guards all suffered from stomach aches… though the target of protection noticed nothing.

Inside a certain room, a pale light was faintly emitted by the walls, and the shadows of three people close to the wall were cast on the ground. The shadows belong to Hajime, Yue, and Shia.

Yue to Hajime's right and Shia to Hajime's left sat while leaning against his shoulders. Though the room was silent, sounds of their light breathing could be heard when closely listening.

They were both embracing one of Hajime's arms and slept using his shoulders as pillows.

Currently, it had been 1 week since the three first entered the【Raisen Great Labyrinth.】During that time, the numerous traps and annoying signs had exhausted their bodies and minds. They had returned to the starting point seven times, attacked by lethal traps forty- eight times, and set off pointless traps one-hundred sixty-nine times.

Though they were angry at Mildy Riasen at first, after 4 days had passed, they simply stopped caring.

They had more than enough rations, and their bodies' specs made it so they would not easily die, a fortune within their misfortune. Now, they were resting after advancing, searching for clues all the while. As a result, they began to understand the pattern of the structure alterations. By placing "marks," they were able to confirm where the blocks were positioned.

They might be able to progress from now on. While thinking that, Hajime turned to the girls sleeping to either side.

「They sure can sleep comfortably… Isn't this a Great Labyrinth? 」 Hajime smiled wryly while muttering to himself. He had stayed

up as lookout for a long time. He quietly stroked Yue's hair. She smiled lightly. Hajime's eyes also went back to their former state.

He then looked at Shia on his other side. 「Munya munya～ 」she mumbled as she drooled on his shoulder; she truly had a slack sleeping expression. It may have been because she felt safe with Hajime.

Hajime gently stroked her blue hair with a gray hue as well as her rabbit ears, showing a complex expression.

「Honestly, just what the hell is there good about someone like me… enough that you would even follow me here… 」

He looked at Shia with tender eyes despite often throwing about abusive words. What Shia sought were the emotions Yue already had. Even so, Shia's positive attitude, cheerfulness, and her unwillingness to give up despite how much she cried…

was attractive to Hajime. His strokes became even gentler. At that time, Shia began talking in her sleep.

「Munya… Auu… Hajime-shan, how bold～ Doing it outside～

Everyone will see… 」「… 」

Hajime's gentle gaze immediately disappeared. He gently used both

hands and quietly moved them pinch Shia's nose and close her mouth. Shia's calm expression gradually changed into a painful one, but he continued, not minding her.

「Mm～ Mm? Mmm～? Mm!! Mm!! Puha! Haa, haa, Wh, what are you doing!? Even though it was an attack while I was asleep, it had the completely wrong meaning!」

Shia panted as she woke up and fiercely complained. Hajime looked at her with cold eyes.

「So? What kind of pervert do you think I am in your head? What exactly was I doing outside? Hm?」

「Eh? Hah… that was a dream!? Why～ Even though Hajime-san became so kind and was finally unable to suppress his overflowing feelings, your words causing me to writhe about in embarrassment, and then you finally decided to, in publi Hebu!?」

Without listening to her any longer, Hajime flicked her forehead. Shia fell back from the impact, her head hitting the wall on the way; she squatted with tear-filled eyes. Her shameless character was always at the ready to appear.

While rubbing the back of her head, Shia muttered, 「I felt like something good happened, but is it just my imagination?」 She had likely unconsciously felt Hajime patting her; however, because he knew she would get carried away if he told her, Hajime simply ignored her.

Because Shia woke up (though by force,) Hajime gently shook Yue awake. 「… Nn… Auu?」 She let out a lovely smile while slowly opening her eyes. With a blank expression, she looked up and saw Hajime there. She rubbed her mouth on Hajime's shoulder again and quietly parted from him, straightening up her appearance.

「Uu, Yue-san is so cute… This is how a girl should be woken up～ Compared to her, I was…」

Shia grew depressed, and Yue looked at her in wonder, only to say the words, 「Because you're Shia.」

「From the start, you understood the overwhelming difference in

Girl

Battle Power, right? Rather than being depressed, start with some soul searching.」

「… Where's your kindness, did you drop it somewhere?」 「…? Hajime didn't drop anything like that.」

「Gusu, only Yue-san. Damn it.」

Shia stood up after some soul searching. Yue and Hajime were also ready. This time, they prayed they would not be returned to the start; and so, the trio resumed their journey.

Because there would be plenty of unpleasant traps and annoying signs once again, they cleared their mind and soul.

They eventually reached a room they had only visited once, even after a week. It was the room with golem knights which made them remember how mad they were when they were returned to the start for the first time. However, this time, the sealed door was open from the start, and inside was not a room but a passage.

「This is… It will be troublesome if they surround us again. Let's

rush to the open door right now!」「Mm!」

「Yes!」

They quickly broke through the golem knight room at once. When they approached the center, as expected, the golems could be heard rushing out of recesses on both sides of the wall. They continued advancing while kicking and shooting them, buying themselves a little time.

They ran faster so they could reach the altar before being caught by the knights. Though the golems rushed after them, they were unable to catch up to the three who had already passed the door. Having successfully escaped, Hajime grinned.

However, his smile vanished in an instant. This time, the golem passed through the door. Also…

「Wha!? They can run on the ceiling!?」「… Surprising.」

「Gravity-san, please do your job~!」

The golem knights chased after them and, as if ignoring gravity, ran along the walls and ceiling. The three were surprised. Hajime immediately looked at the passage and used “Mineral Investigation,” but he knew all of the materials already. He did not detect anything that could neutralize gravity or anything that could act as an adhesive.

「How are they doing that?」

He muttered to himself unintentionally. He them took a peek at the golems behind him, more surprised as he turned around.

One of the golems on the ceiling was running while jumping and, like a cannonball, advanced with tremendous momentum as it jumped toward them in mid-air.

「Wh, wha!? Shitty bastard!」

Hajime called out in surprise while firing Donner rapidly. The golem knight’s helmet and shoulders were destroyed, and the great sword and shield it held dropped; however, without falling to the ground, it continued advancing toward the three.

「Dodge it!」 「Yeah!」

「Wakya!」

They avoided the golem knight’s head, body, sword, and shield by jumping and bending their bodies. The wreckage of the golem passed Hajime and the girls, flew toward the walls and ceiling without reducing momentum, and crashed and rolled around on the floor.

「Hey, wait, isn't that…」「Mm… It "fell."」

「Gravity-san is doing his job, I see.」

It was just as Yue and Shia said. The golem knights were able to control gravity in some way. Though no one understood why they did not use it last time, it was likely because they could not use it until the room had become a passage.

While making this hypothesis, the three were blocked by the golems that "fell." Some approached while spinning their swords like pinwheel; these were stopped by gunfire and "Rupture" from a distance while Shia struck those that drew near.

After a while, Hajime and the girls felt a presence different from the knights.

「Muu… Hajime.」

「Yeah, I know. This Labyrinth can reconstruct itself, so it must be something like that.」

「W, we're surrounded.」

After the knights fell, they began reconstructing themselves. Hajime and the two girls decided to wait for everything to approach. The knights held their shields up and moved forward, as if they had become a wall. They created a two-row formation with the knights in back supporting those in front. Perhaps they had learned that they would be crushed by sheer power without a movement like

this.

「Tch, how troublesome.」

While clicking his tongue, Hajime put Donner & Schlag back into their holsters. After that, he took a weapon out of “Treasure Warehouse.”

In his hands was a weapon with a rectangular shape and twelve rotating barrels; it was his Rocket & Missile Launcher “Orcan.” The rockets themselves were 30 centimeters in length, and each had more destructive power than the typical grenade. By using Creation Magic, he installed stones at the tips which could generate “Lightning Clad.” By utilizing this in tandem with static electricity and Combustion Stone powder, the tips would ignite on impact.

Hajime grinned as he held Orcan up.

「Yue, Shia! Cover your ears! I’ll blow them up!」「Mm. 」

「Eh～ What was that!?」

Shia, seeing Orcan’s odd shape for the first time only opened her eyes wide. Yue thrust her fingers into her own ears. Shia’s rabbit ears stood upright. Without caring, Hajime pulled the trigger.

Pashu! The rocket was launched, leaving trails of sparks behind it. It was aimed at the legion of golem knights that laid in wait.

The next moment, it exploded. The pressure from igniting the large amount of Combustion Stone powder shook the walls of the passage. The golems in the line of fire were violently thrown

against the walls and ceiling. They no longer resembled their original forms; it would take a fair bit of time for them to be reconstructed.

The three jumped over the wreckage of the golem knights immediately.

「My rabbit ears～ My rabbit ears were～!!」

While everyone ran, Shia folded her rabbit ears and held them in agony with tear-filled eyes. The Rabbit Clan had the most excellent hearing amongst Demi-humans after all.

「That's why I said to cover your ears.」「Eh? What was that? I can't hear you.」「… Truly a shameless rabbit…」

Though Hajime and Yue looked at Shia in amazement, Shia, who was in agony, did not notice.

After dealing with knights who were once again falling, they ran through the passage for a good 5 minutes. Finally, they saw the end. Ahead of the passage was a huge room; the floor itself was broken here and there, but there was a landing 10 meters ahead of them.

「Yue, Shia! Jump!」

Yue and Shia (who somehow recovered) nodded. Behind them, golems continued to fall, trying to stop the three. Finally, Hajime and the girls reached the end of the passage and jumped. Their jumping power, with body strengthening, far outstripped any Olympic athlete. They easily broke the world record and landed on

the ground before them.

Still, it was a characteristic of this Great Labyrinth that nothing would come out as expected… Somehow, in front of Hajime and the girls who drew a parabolic arc as they jumped, the square block began moving.

「What!?」

Hajime had shouted numerous times in this Labyrinth. Their foothold had taken distance. Because of this, they would fall; they looked below to see a deep pit. When he prepared to shoot an anchor out, Yue's voice immediately rang.

『— "Soar!"』

Using the updraft from her Wind Magic, the three managed to have their jumping distance extended. Though it was only for a moment, it was still enough. He managed to catch the edge of the block that was still moving and used the spikes on his artificial arm to secure himself. Hajime hung with Yue and Shia clinging to him.

「N, nice, Yue.」

「As expected of Yue-san!」「… Praise me more.」

Hajime and Shia praised Yue who was unconsciously smiling from avoiding the fall. Yue had consumed a large amount of magic power and was tired, but she still had a triumphant mood.

Even so, that peaceful atmosphere was disrupted as golem knights came flying through the air. They had likely controlled gravity so

they would not fall. They approached the three who were still hanging.

「!? Yue, Shia, climb!」

While issuing orders, Hajime took out Donner and rapidly shot the approaching golem knights. Yue and Shia climbed up Hajime's body which was still moving with the block. Hajime used his strength to pull himself onto the block once they got off him.

The place he was hanging at moments before was pierced with many swords that had flown at him with tremendous speed. Hajime shot from above the golem knights, frozen stiff after using their skill.

「Shit, these guys, I don't know if it's from gravity control or not, but their movements and tactics are getting better.」

「… Maybe the cause is here?」

「A ha ha, what's with that common sense? Everything's floating, right?」

As Shia said, everything in the vicinity was floating.

The place they had entered was a massive spherical room. It must have been at least 2 kilometers in diameter. Inside the room, blocks of all kinds of shapes and sizes were floating and moving about irregularly. It was an area which completely ignored gravity. However, for some reason, Hajime and the girls still felt its effects. Perhaps only specific materials in the room were not restricted by gravity.

Inside this room, golem knights were able to fly about freely. Their direction of falling was controlled, which allowed them to move about rapidly. If they were living beings, they would easily die from the tremendous G forces. When they thought back about the knights' improving tactics as they approached this room, then perhaps…

「The one controlling the golems is here, maybe?」

Hearing Hajime's guess, Yue and Shia stiffened their expressions as they agreed. None of them knew why, but the surrounding golems did not attack them. The three simply observed the surroundings since nothing was happening. They did not know if this was their final destination or if it continued further in; however, the room was definitely one of the deepest rooms given the uniqueness of the room and how the golem knights had changed.

Hajime used "Far Sight" to investigate the massive spherical space. The next moment, Shia spoke up in a voice filled with

unease. 「Run!」

「「!?」」

Hajime and Yue, without asking what had happened, jumped with Shia's warning. Fortunately, a block passed by several meters ahead, allowing them to escape from the block they were standing on before.

And then, Zugagagan!! A meteorite -like illusion appeared and crashed into the previous block, blasting it to small pieces. Something massive had fallen while burning, making the term

meteorite an apt description. The block was destroyed, and the massive object passed through.

Cold sweat flowed down Hajime's cheek. He would have received a direct hit without Shia's warning. Since he was unable to use "Strength of Gold," he would have died instantly. Furthermore, he was unable to sense it coming. Immediately after Shia gave her warning, he certainly felt a presence; however, its falling speed would have been impossible to avoid by that time.

「Shia, you're a life saver. Thanks.」「… Mm, big achievement.」

「E he he, it was good "Premonition" activated, though it ate up all my magic…」

Apparently, Shia's unique magic, "Premonition," activated faster than Hajime's Physical Perception. "Premonition" could predict the future based on Shia's actions if she used it actively; however, it could activate automatically as well. Like what happened just before, it would predict any large danger that would bring death to her either directly or indirectly.

In other words, if they received a direct hit, at least Shia would have died. Hajime looked at the object which passed by them with a new feeling of horror. He looked over the edge of the block to below; when he thought something moved, it suddenly flew up with tremendous momentum, passing above them in no time. It remained in place, its eye shining as it glared at the three.

「Hey, seriously.」「… So… big.」

「It feels like a boss.」

The three muttered their impression of it. Though Yue's remark was a little dangerous, it was still within tolerable limits…

probably.

What appeared in front of the three was a massive golem knight which floated in midair. Though the armor was the same, it was approximately 20 meters tall. Its right hand burned, as if its fist was heated, which may have been the reason for the block shattering into pieces. In its left hand was a flail-type weapon, a morning star.

Everyone took their stance while gazing at the golem. The surrounding golems could be heard flying about, surrounding the three. They stood in line and raised their swords before their chests. It was as if they were saluting their king.

They were completely surrounded and could feel the tension. Silence filled the room; it was a critical situation. The moment they moved, the slaughter would begin.

What destroyed the strained mood was…

「Yaho～ Nice to meet you～ Everyone's beloved Mildy Raisen has arrived～」

A joke-like greeting from the massive golem.

「「「…」」」

From the gigantic Golem, whose full body armor, helmet was terrifying and whose sharp glint was able to make people freeze, came a random and light greeting. Its words were incomprehensible, even for Hajime. For a moment, they forgot they were surrounded, and could only stare blankly with their mouths open.

Because the three froze, the golem let out a sullen tone. It was a woman's voice.

「You know～ I already greeted you, so reply or something. That's manners, you know? Honestly, that's why youngsters these days… need more common sense.」

They were words filled with the intent to irritate. Furthermore, the golem raised its burning right hand and left hand holding the morning star at shoulder height. It was a random human gesture. The three were truly irritated. It was as if they were reading those annoying signs again. Though the existence which called itself "Mildy Raisen" may be behind those words, that woman should have been dead; she was human, after all.

For the time being, Hajime observed his surroundings.

「Sorry about that. Mildy Raisen should be a human and already dead, right? I never heard of a golem with an ego, either… so we were surprised, forgive us. After that, please explain who you are. Make it brief.」

「Eh～ Even under this situation, you're really conceited. 」 There was no need to observe any etiquette. Rather, he let out a

straight ball. As expected, because of his unexpected reaction, the golem calling itself Mildy had a perplexed expression; however, it immediately recovered and responded in a way that would make others think it was definitely smile, at least, if it were human.

「Mm～? Mildy-san is a golem from the start, you know～ To say I was human…」

「I've read a little about you from Oscar's memoirs. It clearly states you're a human woman, doesn't it? Rather, I don't want to hear anything stupid. I already said to make it brief. Even if you try to obstruct us, what we need to do is t he same. I will turn you into scrap and move on. Tell us everything before you can continue making those stupid noises.」

「O, ohh, it's my first conversation in a long time, so, no matter what you say , I'm dancing with joy inside. Rather, did you just say Oscar? Don't tell me, you've conquered O-chan's Labyrinth?」

「Yeah, if it was Oscar Orcus's Labyrinth, we took it already. Rather, we're supposed to be the ones asking questions. If you won't talk, then we'll fight, got it? Well, it's not like we need to know anything. Our only objective is the Age of Gods Magic.」

Hajime turned Donner toward the golem. Though Yue had a clear expression, Shia said, 「Uwa～ He didn't falter at all～」in half surprise and half amazement as she looked at Hajime.

「… Age of Gods Magic, so you plan on doing some god slaying? Are you going to kill those shitty bastards? If you've gotten through

O-chan's Labyrinth, then you know the situation, right? 」

「 I already said we were the ones who should do the questioning. What we want are answers, so answer our question from before. 」

「 This guy～ He really is conceited～ Well, that's fine～ Umm, what was it… Ahh, my identity. Hmm～ 」

「 Make it brief. I don't need any long explanations like Oscar's. 」
「 A ha ha, yeah, he really does take a long time, and there's too much theory～ 」

The golem looked up at the ceiling, far into the distance with nostalgia. It truly had human-like movements. Yue gazed at it with her typical flat expression while Shia was restless from the surrounding knights.

「 Hmm, I'll tell you briefly, then. I am Mildy Raisen. All the golems here can be explained with Age of the Gods Magic. If you want to know more, then defeat me! Well, something along those lines. 」

「 In the end, that was hardly an explanation… 」

「 Ha ha ha, it's that, right? Before you complete your conquest, you won't receive information. There's no meaning behind Labyrinths otherwise, you know? 」

This time, the golem, Mildy Golem, waved her index finger in the

air as if scolding him. Though they did not know for sure, if Mildy Raisen was inside it, excluding the character, the golem certainly had its own charm. Yue boldly muttered, 「… Its only problem is inside,」 expressing Hajime's thoughts.

They still did not understand anything. If Mildy was truly inside, Hajime guessed it would have been some form of residual thought. Hajime vaguely recalled from his memory that his classmate, Nakamura Eri, was a necromancer; she was able to handle residual thoughts which could even carry a clear intent. In other words, it was still within reason that this was done by Age of the Gods Magic.

Regardless, it was not a magic that could be used to move to other worlds that he was looking for, so Hajime was a little disappointed and asked the golem, no, Mildy Golem, a question.

「Your Age of Gods Magic, is it related to residual thoughts? If so, there's no reason for me to be here.」

「Hm～? That look, so you have some other purpose to get Age of Gods Magic? By the way, that's not mine～ I was helped by Ra-kun to establish my soul in this body～」

Hajime's only objective was to return to his own world. Because he did not understand anything about souls and thoughts, obtaining Age of the Gods Magic that manipulated something like that would be pointless. With that said, Mildy's reply did not match up with his predictions. Even if he did not know who Ra-kun was, it was likely one of th e other "Liberators" That person attached Mildy's soul to Mildy Golem.

「Then what is your Age of Gods Magic? Depending on your

answer, we'll return as we are… 」

「 Mm～ Mm～ Do you want to know? Do you really want to know? 」

Once again, Mildy asked with a tone that was clearly joyous. Hajime, irritated, awaited her response.

「 If you want to know～ answer my question first. 」

The last few words had a different tone. Her frivolous nature until now had vanished, and she was serious. Hajime and the girls were surprised by this change. Hajime asked back without revealing that on his expression, though.

「 What is it? 」

「 What's your objective? What do you need Age of Gods Magic for? 」

I will not forgive any lies, was implied in her tone. Even her joking atmosphere had completely disappeared. This was probably her true nature. Thinking about it, she challenged even the gods for the sake of the people. She would not entrust her magic to someone with an unknown purpose.

It was different from the will in Orcus's image recording. No matter how many centuries pass by, she intended to remain waiting deep in the Labyrinth to ascertain the challengers' purpose. In a way, this was torture for her. Even her frivolous attitude was a bluff; her true

self was someone with great patience and a strong will. She had a sense of responsibility.

Perhaps Yue realized this, since she was looking at Mildy Golem with a different expression. Yue understood the suffering of someone alone in the depths of darkness. For Mildy, who was determined to leave her soul behind and stay here, she felt something beyond sympathy.

Hajime looked straight at Mildy Golem and replied without any deception.

「My objective is to return to my home. I was forced into this world by the ones you call mad gods. I am looking for Age of Gods Magic that can transfer people between worlds… I have no intention on defeating the gods in your stead. I don't have the slightest inclination to risk my life for this world.」

「…」

For a while, Mildy Golem quietly stared at Hajime, then, perhaps after reaching some conclusion, she nodded. Afterward, she simply muttered, 「I see.」

The next moment, her frivolity returned, as if her serious nature was an illusion.

「Mm～ I see, I see. So that's it～ You're from a different world～ Right, that's a problem for you～ Okay, then it's time for battle! Defeat me and you'll get Age of the Gods Magic!」

「I lost sense of your strange line of reasoning … what's with that 『It's time, 』 rather, didn't you hear me? If your magic has nothing to do with transportation, then there's no meaning, is there? Or are you saying it's what I want? 」

「N fu fu～ 」 Mildy laughed unpleasantly. 「That is… 」 her voice was filled with the intent of making him wait for the answer.

Finally, his irritation reaching its limits, as well as because they would be fighting from now on, Hajime took out Orcan while Mildy shouted the answer she withheld.

「Not telling～! 」 「Die. 」

Without asking more questions, Hajime fired the rockets from Orcan, leaving trails of sparks. The storm of destruction flew toward Mildy Golem.

The violent explosions shook the room, smoke rising from the golem's body.

「Did we do it!? 」

「… Shia, that's a flag. 」

First strike for victory! Shia had a joyous look, only to be verbally jabbed at by Yue. It was as Yue said. A burning hand appeared from within the smoke, dispersing it.

When the smoke cleared up, Mildy Golem appeared with some parts of both her forearms broken. Mildy Golem picked up the floating blocks that drew near and used them for materials to fix parts of her broken arms.

「Fu fu, what a fast attack～ Come, my Age of the Gods Magic might be what you seek～ But because I'm strong～ Work hard so you won't die～」

While laughing happily, Mildy Golem threw the morning star in her left hand at the three. It was not thrown. The morning star just flew with a tremendous velocity without any starting motion. Perhaps the gravitational force was adjusted to make it "Fall" like the other golems.

The three avoided the attack by jumping onto a nearby floating block as the previous block they stood on was shattered into small pieces. The morning star turned about and returned to Mildy Golem's hand.

「We're doing it! Yue, Shia, let's destroy Mildy!」「Mm!」「Yes!」

Along with Hajime's shout, within one of the Seven Great Labyrinths, 【Raisen Gorge,】the final battle began.

The golem knights which had been in a standby state began to move as if signaled by Hajime's shout. Just like before, they turned toward the three and rushed out.

Yue took out a water bottle which was noisily hitting the other

bottles and waved it horizontally, mowing down her enemies. The water, pressurized to the limit, cut apart the golem knights like a laser.

「A ha ha, you can do it after all～ But the enemies are fifty infinitely regenerating knights and me, I wonder if you can handle us all at the same time～」

While speaking sarcastically, Mildy fired the morning star again. Shia jumped high into the air onto the top portion of a moving pyramid. Hajime did not move from his spot and turned Donner to the morning star, firing rapidly.

Despite only a single gunshot being heard, six bullets were fired. His attacks were aimed at the morning Sstar. The metal ball had a huge mass; there was little change in trajectory, even with six rail gun shots; even so, the trajectory changed enough that the attack missed Hajime by a large margin.

At the same time, Shia jumped and brought down Drücken as she fell.

「I already saw that～」

Along with those words, Mildy Golem suddenly moved to the side at great velocity. She must have been “falling” to the side.

「Kuu, you!」

Shia grit her teeth, her aim off, and pulled the trigger. With a

cartridge being ejected from the side, her aim was corrected. After spinning three times, she landed a direct blow on Mildy Golem.

Mildy Golem used her left arm to guard. There was the sound of a tremendous impact; however, as if nothing happened, Mildy Golem swiped her left hand horizontally.

「Kyaa!!」「Shia!」

Shia let out a scream. She managed to pull Drücken's trigger to correct her pose as well as use the recoil to make an emergency landing on a nearby block.

「Hah, so you can do it after all. Hey, Yue, what kind of training did you put her through?」

「… Drove her into a corner.」

「… I see, so polishing her ability to survive.」

Hajime used "Far Sight" to see Shia bounce on the blocks to return, admiring the two in his mind. On the block Hajime and Yue were on, the golem knights rushing them could no longer be held back by Yue alone.

Hajime pulled out Metzelei from "Treasure Warehouse" and turned his back to Yue, unleashing the monster capable of scattering twelve thousand deaths per minute

Its six barrels began rotating as he fired. While letting out sounds

particular to this weapon, countless flashes flew freely about the room while the enemies who met the bullets midair were turned to scrap and fell to the bottom. Those that sneaked to the side or evaded were cut perfectly by lasers of water.

More than forty golem knights fell to the bottom of the room in a tragic state in no time. After some time, they would likely finish reconstructing and return to the front line, but it was good that they would not get in the way for a while. At least, this should hopefully last until the boss, Mildy Golem, was destroyed.

「Wh, what was that!? I've never seen or heard of anything like that!」

Hajime put Metzelei back into "Treasure Warehouse" and pulled out Donner again, speaking out in a voice that could be heard even by Shia at a distance…

「Mildy's core is the same place as the heart! Destroy it!」「Wh, wha! How did you know that!?」

Once again, Mildy let out a voice of astonishment. She did not know Hajime had the Evil Eye which made him capable of seeing the flow of magic power. Because they now knew the location of the core that would let them defeat the golem, Yue and Shia's eyes were filled with a sharp light.

There were currently ten golem knights floating in the air. The three released waves of attacks aimed at Mildy's heart.

Hajime immediately tried to approach by jumping about on the floating blocks. With the current output of his rail gun, it would be hard to pierce through Mildy Golem's gigantic body and hit its core. For that reason, he decided to destroy the armor from point blank range; he pulled out a grenade.

However, it was not that simple. By the time he noticed Mildy Golem's eyes shining, blocks floated from overhead toward

Hajime at a tremendous speed.

「!?」

「I never said I could only control the knights～」

Ignoring Mildy's voice, Hajime immediately operated his artificial arm.

Dogan!! With a sound that could affect even the innards, an explosive sound echoed through the room, a large pressure wave being emitted from the back of his artificial arm. He had shot a powerful shotgun. Though the acceleration using electromagnetism would be more effective, he had also compressed the Combustion Stone powder to a much higher degree than in Donner. The recoil was severe, allowing Hajime to change his body's movements in midair and dodge the blocks. He managed to land on a nearby block.

Naturally, Mildy Golem tried to "drop" Hajime's foothold, but, before she was aware of it, Shia had already approached from behind, about to deliver a strong blow to Mildy Golem's head. She wanted to destroy the eye part which gave off a suspicious light.

Mildy Golem, noticing Shia approach, made the golems target Shia who was mid-jump; Shia was completely defenseless. The moment she was about to be cut by the swords,

「… I won't let you.」

This time, it was Yue who moved before she was aware of it. Using "Rupture," Yue cut the knights attacking Shia.

「As expected of Yue-san!」

With the problem taken care of, Shia continued to advance in the air, delivering an attack which used her body strengthening to its very limits.

「A golem won't lose in terms of power～」

Mildy Golem proved her own words. She swung her burning right hand at Shia as she turned around.

Shia's Drücken and Mildy Golem's heated knuckle collided, releasing a tremendous roar. The floating blocks in the surroundings were blown away by the shock wave.

「Damn you!」

Unable to penetrate Mildy Golem's fist, Shia shouted to pull out more of her strength; however, as expected of a golem's physical strength, Shia was blown back.

「Kyaa!!」

Shia screamed, There was no floating block where she was heading in. Thinking Shia might fall at this rate, Yue jumped out from the side and held Shia. Using “Soar” for a moment, they changed trajectory and landed on a nearby block.

「That’s quiet a combination you make～」

With a composed voice, Mildy Golem looked up at Yue and Shia who were looking downward. An unexpected voice came from nearby.

「Don’t they?」

「!?」

Mildy Golem panicked as she looked to the side. Before she was aware of him, he had slipped into her bosom while affixing his location with an anchor, his feet forced into the cracks on her armor. He aimed thehuge electromagnetically accelerated anti-material rifle, “Schlagen,” at her heart. Bright crimson sparks gushed forth.

「Wh, when did you!?」

Mildy’s surprise was cut short by the roar from Schlagen. Having fired a mass of killing intent from point blank range, it

blew Mildy Golem away, her chest armor shattered into tiny fragments. Even if “Lightning Clad” could not be used at full output, Schlagen’s firepower was still the same as Donner’s normal maximum output. It was enough to destroy the metallic armor. Even golem knight armor could be destroyed by the typical Donner, so Mildy Golem’s armor, made from the same material, even if a little thicker, could be destroyed with Schlagen.

Mildy Golem was blown backward, smoke coming from her chest. Hajime also flew back; by shooting an anchor, he turned about midair and landed on a nearby floating block. He then observed Mildy Golem's condition.

Yue and Shia also jumped to the block near Hajime. 「…Did we do it?」

「There was a response, but…」 「I hope it ends with this.」

Shia made her wishful thoughts known; Hajime had a delicate expression. Though Mildy Golem's chest armor was destroyed, unbeknownst to them, nearby blocks began moving. The three could hear a voice filled with admiration.

「Wow～ You're the real deal, that was close. If there was no magic dispersal here, your artifact's real power would be dangerous～ I made this dungeon with great effort, though, Mildy-chan is a genius!!」

Mildy Golem praised herself; however, her words did not enter Hajime's ears. His expression was sharp. There was jet black armor beneath the wrecked metal, and he recognized the material.

「Nnu～ So this interests you～」

Mildy Golem noticed Hajime's gaze and, with a joyful voice, pointed at the jet black armor. 「This is, you know～」 she began to

explain with the tone of someone important, but Hajime completed her words for her.

「… Azanthium, huh, bastard.」

Azanthium Ore was this world's hardest ore, and it was a mineral Hajime used in some of his equipment. A thin coating of the ore was able to endure Donner's maximum power. For that reason, Schlagen's attack was unable to scratch it. Hajime knit his brow because he knew it would be difficult to destroy the armor.

「My? You know of this～ I guess that's a given. You've conquered O-chan's Labyrinth, after all, so it was impossible you didn't know how to use Creation Magic～ Now come, since you understand your limit and feel hopeless, let's move on to the second round!」

Mildy snatched the materials from the smashed floating blocks and reconstructed the metallic armor's surface before firing off the morning star.

「Wh, what should we do, Hajime-san!?」

「There's still a way. No matter what, seal off her movements!」
「… Mm, got it.」

Thinking they did not have the firepower, Shia was shaken. Hajime had a last resort, so he ordered the two to seal off Mildy Golem's movements. Yue and Shia seemed relieved as they evaded the incoming morning star, jumping to nearby floating blocks.

However,

「I won't let you～」

With those words, the floating blocks began rotating at high speed; with their footholds rotating, everyone lost balance.

The morning star then crashed into the three with its immense power. The three had abandoned their block which had become fine dust. Hajime clung to the chain while Yue used the various fragments and "Soar" to move about. Shia used the recoil from Drücken blasts to make an emergency landing on another floating block.

Perhaps because that was Mildy Golem's goal, she thrust her burning knuckle at them.

「Kuu!!」

「!!」

Yue and Shia avoided a direct hit but were affected as it passed by them. The two groaned in anguish; even so, Yue aimed at Mildy Golem's hand and invoked "Rupture" while Shia used Drücken's stake to attack, piercing into Mildy Golem's armor and clinging to it.

"Rupture" was able to cut through part of Mildy Golem's right hand, but it could not completely sever it; Yue landed on another floating block with a mortified expression.

On the other hand, Shia was clinging to Mildy Golem's left shoulder, making a full swing with Drücken toward Mildy's head; however, Mildy Golem suddenly made Shia "fall" and lose her balance.

「Kyaa!」

Shia let out a scream. Hajime, who was clinging to the morning star chain, made use of its movements and jumped up to catch Shia in the air.

「Hajime-san!」

Shia called out to Hajime with a voice full of joy. It was the rescuing embrace she yearned for. Though she was aware of their situation, she immediately felt elated; however, as expected of Hajime Quality, he prepared to throw her as he once threw her into the crowd of demons before.

「H, Hajime- san!?」「One more time!」

He reloaded a cartridge into his artificial arm and fired it. Using the recoil, Hajime rotated and threw Shia at Mildy Golem.

「Damn it!」

She had thought her desire fulfilled, only to find herself now approaching the enemy in a suicide attack. Desperately, she prepared Drücken.

Even Mildy felt Hajime's actions to be cold; however, she was still prepared to intercept the oncoming attack. She drew back her burning knuckle, her fist clenched. The next moment, a large explosion came from the chain connected to her morning star.

「Wa wa wa, What!?」

Mildy cried out in surprise. The explosion was due to numerous grenades Hajime had attached to the chain. With the explosive

power, the chain was blown apart at the middle, the left arm it was wrapped about greatly damaged. Mildy Golem's balance was disrupted from the explosions as well.

Shia swung Doryuuuken. 「Ryaaaa!!」

She pulled the trigger on the handle, releasing a cartridge. Drücken approached Mildy Golem using the acceleration from the shot.

Mildy Golem was occupied by the severe damage on her left arm. Immediately, Drücken hit her left hand. Without mercy, the brittle left arm was destroyed up to the shoulder.

Using the momentum from her swing, Shia floated up in midair. Mildy Golem, wanting to take revenge, released her burning knuckle toward Shia.

However, while Mildy was focusing on Shia, a laser of water came from below and precisely cut the area that was partially severed. With the wound cut wide open, Mildy Golem's right hand was cut off.

「… Fu fu, confidence is the greatest enemy.」 Yue smiled.

「You! Don't get carried away!」

Mildy's voice showed her irritation. In that moment, Hajime fired an anchor at a floating block overhead and moved through the air like a pendulum, catching Shia who had fallen. He held her by her armpit rather than embraced her.

「Hajime-san～ Aren't you going to hug me as a reward? Please, read the mood～」

「I don't want to hear that from you. You, who's trying to fulfill your desires in a situation like this is the one who should read the mood.」

The moment they landed on a nearby block, Shia pouted, and Hajime responded in amazement. Mildy, lacking both arms, did not look at the nearby blocks to reconstruct her arms; rather, she simply looked at the ceiling, her eyes shining strongly.

Because he had a bad feeling, Hajime's expression stiffened. Shia's face was pale as well.

「Hajime-san, Yue-san! Dodge! It's about to rain!」

Hajime had a feeling Shia's unique magic had been triggered. They were in a dangerous situation that would kill Shia or someone related to her. He confirmed Yue's location a bit behind him and took a stance to respond to anything that might happen.

Then, it happened.

The entire room shook. The low rumbling of the earth echoed, and fragments fell from the ceiling. Rather than fragments, it was the ceiling itself falling.

「!? That bastard!」

「Fu fu fu, this is payback. Though I'm incapable of controlling multiple things other than the knights, if it's just to make things "fall," then I can do so with hundreds of objects~ Show me how you'll get past this~」

Though Mildy's easygoing words still expressed her irritation, they had no time to notice it. The walls were made of numerous blocks, as well as the ceiling. One by one, each with a weight surpassing a dozen tons, they fell. Cold sweat flowed down Hajime's forehead.

「H, Hajime-san!」「We're joining Yue!」

Shia trembled as she was carried; using his anchor and swinging like a pendulum, the two headed to Yue. Yue also used the floating blocks as footholds to jump toward them.

In that time, Mildy Golem continued to look at the ceiling. Perhaps, as she said, unlike the golem knights, she was only able to control one or two at most. When it came to the knights, there was some sense of autonomy. When it came to group combat, perhaps Mildy gave a general command, allowing for cooperation.

But this was not the case with this attack. Most likely, in order to make them fall, she was concentrating on removing the hundreds of massive stones from the ceiling.

Somehow, when the three rejoined, the stones simultaneously poured down from the sky.

Go go go go go go go go go!!! Gobah!!

Large clusters of stones fell from the ceiling, letting out devastating roars while the room quaked. There was also the risk that Mildy could alter their trajectories since the stones were specifically aimed at where the three were. Even Mildy Golem would not commit a double suicide here, so it would be safe to go beneath her; after noticing that, he dashed out with tremendous speed along the wall, but he would not make it in time.

「Yue! Shia! Hold tight! Don't let go, no matter what!」

「Yeah!」 「Yes!」

As soon as he heard a response, he took out Orcan from "Treasure Warehouse." He rapidly fired twelve rockets at oncoming stones. While leaving trails of thunder, they flew toward the death looming overhead, exploding one by one.

Their vision was shrouded, though they were smiling that Orcan's attack power was able to disperse some of the stones. After seeing a portion of the ceiling, Hajime put Orcan away and pulled out Donner & Schlag, firing them toward the ceiling. He tried to widen their path of safety even a little, so he fired at the fragments of the large stones to shatter them further.

However, he could only go so far.

Finally, after the clusters of stones reached the three, Hajime used his unique magic, "Light Speed." Hajime's world immediately lost color; he recognized the falling fragments of death, one by one.

He passed by the barrage of stone fragments using the minimal movements necessary. At the same time, he spun the guns in his hands to reload them, focusing his shots on destroying the unavoidable fragments and changing their trajectory. He could not waste even a single bullet. Just like his fight with the guardian of 【Orcus Great Labyrinth】where he first expanded his perception to the level of “Light Speed,” he needed to surpass his limits of concentration to get through this ordeal.

Hajime used another magic, “Limit Break.”

His body was immediately wrapped in a crimson light, but that immediately disappeared. If it was under normal circumstances, Hajime’s physical abilities would have increased three-fold, but the magic was nullified by the Labyrinth’s magic dispersal. “Limit Break” itself was similar to wearing a reinforced exoskeleton constructed of magic. It was different from body strengthening which was applied internally. Even so, his expanded perception was not diminished by this.

Furthermore, “Breaking the limit” was not something without repercussion. The load on his body was abnormal. If not for the demon flesh he had eaten all this time, modifying his body, his use of “Limit Break” with “Light Speed” would have easily broken his body. In truth, Hajime’s eye and nose were bleeding from the strain.

Yue and Shia swayed unsteadily as he moved, clinging to Hajime who was evading the death raining down on them with minimal movements. He balanced himself on anything present, sometimes using the falling fragments as a foothold as well.

He sharpened his mind, perceiving the cracks on the falling rocks, one by one. Having passed his limit, he found a way to escape death.

Mildy, who observed Hajime and the girls from the wall, saw them being immediately swallowed by the stones. Though they struggled, they were unable to surpass the large masses, as expected. She stopped the “fall” in her disappointment.

With that, the clusters of massive stones began floating with the other blocks.

「Hmm, as expected, it was impossible～ But if they can’t do this much, they won’t be able to win against those shitty bastards～」

Mildy muttered to herself while searching for their corpses. At that time,

「I have no interest in those shitty bastards.」「Eh?」

She heard a familiar voice. It belonged to the insolent white – haired boy with an eye patch who used artifacts she had never seen before and moved at his own pace. Mildy turned her head while expressing her shock, her voice tinged with some joy. Sure enough, Hajime stood there on a nearby floating block, his breathing rough, blood flowing from his eye and nose.

「H, how…」

She had seen Hajime swallowed by a cluster of stones. Mildy could

only doubt what had happened. Seeing this, Hajime smiled.

「It's fine for me to answer that… but is it okay to only focus on me?」「Eh?」

Mildy called out in doubt once again. However, her doubt was immediately cleared with blows of magic.

「"Rupture."」

Yue's dignified voice resounded. Lasers of water rushed out from behind Mildy Golem, hitting her back, feet, head, and shoulders. The water blades tore apart the surface armor with each blow.

「No matter how often you do it, it won't make a difference～ I'll just defeat you after I rebuild my arms～」

「It's not like you'll have time for that.」

Mildy Golem calmly turned around after receiving Yue's magic. Hajime approached her in a flash with Schlagen in his hand.

「A ha ha, this again? Well, it's impossible to break my Azanthium armor～」

Mildy remained composed. She thought Hajime clung to her to shoot Schlagen at her chest. She did not even try to block him by using floating blocks like before. That much was natural, though, since Hajime's weapon was proven to be ineffective against her armor. Even though they had reached this stage of the battle, he

still chose that attack. Mildy thought he was putting up useless resistance.

However, her composure was fatal. 「I already know that!」

Sparks appeared along Schlagen as he fired a full metal jacket bullet accelerated by electromagnetism toward Mildy Golem's chest at point blank range. The impact blew Mildy Golem backward.

However, unlike before, Hajime did not withdraw. He continued clinging to her using his anchor and pushed his artificial arm into the broken chest plate. Once inside, he fired multiple shots until they were exhausted. The tremendous impact blew Mildy Golem even further, throwing her into a floating block behind her.

「E, even with this, eventually…」「Yue!」

Ignoring Mildy's words, Hajime called out Yue's name. Yue jumped up and released her magic.

「Freeze! — "Frozen Coffin!"」

She activated the magic whose original use was to confine objects within ice. However, it was considered an Advance Class Water Magic. Middle Class magic and anything stronger should have been unusable in this area; even so, it was a magic necessary to restrain Mildy Golem.

The ceiling blocks Mildy attacked with as well as the block behind Mildy Golem were frozen immediately.

「Wh!? Advance Rank magic!?」

Mildy was shocked. Yue was able to use Advance Rank magic. Just like with “Rupture,” by preparing water beforehand, she was able to reduce the consumption of magic power. For that reason, Yue had used the water scattered on some of the blocks Mildy attacked with before, as well as the water on Mildy Golem’s body which were present from Yue’s earlier “Rupture.”

Even so, it would consume enormous magic power; Yue used everything she had, including the magic in the Magic Crystal Series. Yue sat panting on a nearby block.

「You did it, Yue!」

Standing on Mildy Golem’s chest, Hajime took out his last resort from “Treasure Warehouse. What appeared from the void was a large, elongated cylinder 2.5 meters long. There were many mechanisms installed on the outside, and inside was a jet black stake with a diameter of 20 centimeters. On the lower side were four sturdy arms, and it was able to synchronize with the mechanism within Hajime’s artificial arm.

Like that, Hajime placed the four arms over the unmoving Mildy Golem, firing the anchors in them to secure it. Hajime began pouring his magic power into it; the large cylinder let out crimson sparks and the jet black stake loaded inside began to quickly rotate.

Kiiiii!!!

The tone released by the high-speed rotation echoed throughout. Hajime grinned; if not for having a golem's body, Mildy surely would have a cramp in her cheek.

This atrocious weapon was an attachable weapon, "Pile Bunker." Using "Transmute," he had compressed four tons into a small stake 20 centimeters in diameter by 1.2 meters in length, and its surface was coated with Azanthium. It would, undoubtedly, be the heaviest and hardest stake in the world. It was typically shot out with Combustion Stone powder which was compressed at the upper portion of the cylinder and accelerated with electromagnetism.

「Take this with all your might and die.」

With those words, he drove the stake into Mildy Golem's core, as if driving a wooden stake through a vampire.

Gogagagan!!! The pile bunker caused a terrific impacting sound as the jet black stake pierced through Mildy Golem's absolute defense.

The Azanthium armor on the chest wall cracked immediately, and the stake buried itself without mercy. Because of the impact, Mildy Golem's body sank further into the floating block. The block descended rapidly. White smoke could be seen rising from Mildy Golem's chest due to the friction from the high speed rotation.

… However, the light did not disappear from Mildy Golem's eyes.

「Ha ha～ It's still not powerful enough. But I guess it's the real deal? Did it go through ¾ the armor?」

Her voice was somewhat stiff, but Mildy still retained her composure. She was secretly drenched in cold sweat. Though this was a certain kill weapon, because of the insufficient electromagnetic acceleration, its true strength could not be displayed. Disappointingly, it was unable to fully penetrate her defenses. However, Hajime showed no sign of resignation. He had already taken it into account.

「Do it, Shia!」

Hajime put everything away into “Treasure Warehouse” save for the stake and quickly jumped away from Mildy Golem’s chest.

What appeared in his place was Shia, her rabbit ears blowing in

the wind, holding Drücken above her as she fell from above.

「!?」

Mildy had guessed what Shia intended to do. This time, Mildy Golem tried to get away; however, she realized that, at Shia’s current speed, she would not be able to escape by moving the floating block… so she gave up and stopped moving.

Using force from an explosive cartridge, Shia brought down a blow with all her might onto the stake.

The stake sank further with the roar. However, it was unable to fully penetrate the armor. Shia decided to attack using all the remaining cartridges she had and pulled the trigger repeatedly.

Dogon! Dogon! Dogon! Dogon! Dogon! Dogon! 「Ahhhhhh!!」

Shia shouted. She released all her power into the hammer. With all her might, she exerted her strength. The floating block was pushed downward from the impact.

Finally, the floating block crashed into the ground, the black stake penetrating through the absolute defense of the Azanthium armor and reaching Mildy Golem's core. Though it was just the tip, the core could be heard cracking.

When they all crashed into the ground, Shia, using Drücken as a fulcrum, twisted about and, with her body fully strengthened, drove her foot into the stake.

The stake immediately went deeper into the core, causing the cracks to expand…

Finally, the core was crushed.

The light in Mildy Golem's eyes disappeared. Having confirmed that, Shia gradually relaxed her power and sighed in relief.

Immediately, Shia heard Hajime and Yue land behind her. She turned to the two with a smile. Hajime and Yue also smiled in return.

They had finally completed the last trial of one of the Seven Great Labyrinths, 【Raisen Gorge.】

「You did it, Shia. The ending was definitely good. I'm thinking better of you.」

「… Mm, you've worked hard.」

As the dust settled, Hajime and Yue gave their words of praise.

In the center of a large crater was Mildy Golem, not moving in the least; Shia smiled as she supported herself with Drücken.

The reason she had not fallen from exhaustion was because she wanted to look good to the very end. Hajime looked at her stubborn nature which surpassed the trial in admiration while Yue gazed gently at her.

「E he he, thank you. But Hajime- san, isn't this where you say "I started falling in love with you again?"」

「Before that, I'd have to fall in love with you.」

Hajime responded to Shia who joked to hide her embarrassment, her expression contrasting the words he had said. Shia, filled with energy, was truly attractive.

Until recently, she had not even given thought about fighting. She simply wanted to stand on the same stage as Hajime and Yue. It was her strong, deep desire, a desire which helped her face and overcome the trials of one of the Seven Great Labyrinths.

For Hajime, having Shia deliver the final blow was unnecessary. He had a means to force the further in. However, from the kind, gentle Rabbit Clan, Shia, without any fighting ability until recently, had accompanied him to the depths of a Great Labyrinth without whining in the least despite the unease she must have felt inside. Hajime felt this was the best end.

The results were magnificent.

She delivered the last attack with all her energy, and it was enough for Hajime to praise her. Shia's desire to become strong had reached him. Even so, Hajime's feelings toward Shia were not at the level Shia hoped for. Still, her perseverance and willpower strengthened their bond. That was why Hajime gazed at her gently.

「Fue? S, somehow… Hajime-san is looking at me fondly… is, is this a dream?」

「You know… no, well, it can't be helped, considering how I usually treat you…」

Shia pinched her cheek in disbelief. Though Hajime wanted to complain about her reaction, he could not help but accept her thoughts after recalling how she had been treated until now.

Yue approached Shia who was still pinching her cheek. She pulled on Shia's clothes to make her bend down and slowly pat her head. Her disordered hair was fixed slowly and gently.

「U, umm, Yue-san?」

「… Since Hajime won't pat you, though it's regrettable, I'll do it

instead. You did well.」

「Y, Yue-san～ Uu, Why? I can't stop crying, fueeee～」「… Good girl, good girl.」

At first, Shia was confused by Yue's sudden action, but when she understood she was being praised, her tension was released. Shia began to weep and hugged Yue. As expected, she had been holding things in as her first journey suddenly threw her into one of the Seven Great Labyrinths. No matter what, she was determined to go with Hajime and Yue. She was relieved to be praised and acknowledged and could not stop her tears.

As Yue had said, Hajime would not pat her. Shia was the type to easily get carried away. If he awkwardly pat her head, Shia would misunderstand things and she would surely become troublesome. This time, though Hajime was willing to treat her better, he had no reasons to love others like he did Yue. She was "special." Hajime had not considered how Yue might be saddened by that.

「Fueeen～」Shia cried happily into Yue's chest. Yue patted her while looking at her gently… seeing this, it was easy to see how the future would play out.

Yue embraced Shia while spoiling her, and Hajime watched them with an indescribable expression. While the three were like this, a voice called out.

「Umm～ I know the atmosphere is nice and all～ but it's about to get dangerous for me, so can I have some of your time～?」

Truly a familiar voice. 「Hah,」 Hajime and the girls looked at Mildy Golem. Unbeknownst to them, the light in her eyes returned. Everyone took distance immediately. They were certain her core was destroyed, so they could not hide the uneasiness in their minds.

「Wait, wait, it's fine～ You cleared the trial! It's your victory! There's a little power left in the core's fragments, so I thought I'd use this time to talk～ It will only be a few minutes.」

As if to confirm those words, Mildy Golem remained immobile, and the light in the eye portion repeatedly blinked. It would disappear at any moment. It must have been true when she said she would only take a few minutes.

Hajime relaxed and responded.

「So, what is it, undead? You can't read the mood, even after death… though it would be regrettable for the future "Liberators," maybe I should help you pass on.」

「Wha, stop～ what's with this obvious harassment. This is completely unpleasant.」

「I won't hear anything about killing "those shitty bastards," got it?」

Mildy seemed to have an atmosphere as if she were smiling wryly when she heard Hajime speak in such an authoritative manner.

「I won't say that. It's not necessary, after all. What I want to talk about… is more like advice. Even if there is no Age of the Gods Magic that you desire in the Labyrinths you visit, try to obtain them all… because they are necessary for your wish… 」

Perhaps because Mildy's power was almost exhausted, her words were gradually blurring and became fragmented. Without worrying about that, Hajime told her his problem.

「All of them, huh… Then tell us the locations of the other Labyrinths. They were lost in legends, so I really don't know much about them. 」

「Ah, there's that, too… I see, so the other Labyrinths' locations are unknown… It's been so long after all… Hmm, they're…

they're… 」

Gradually, Mildy Golem began losing the power in her voice. Yue and Shia looked serious hearing her voice which seemed sentimental. She had put her soul into a vessel for her duty rather than her personal desire, and she was now passing on after such a long time. They could only stare at her in respect.

Mildy slowly talked about the whereabouts of the remaining Seven Great Labyrinths. Inside her words was a place that surprised them.

「That's all… Good luck. 」

「… You've become modest. What happened to that infuriating tone and those annoying lines? 」

As Hajime said, the Mildy now seemed completely unrelated to the Mildy that irritated them to no end; she was sincere and serious. She had also shown this before their fight when she asked Hajime about his objectives. This was her true self; it was as if she had no need to hide it before she completely disappeared.

「A ha ha, sorry～ But… those shitty bastards… were really unpleasant… only saying unpleasant things… that's why, even just a little… I want you to get used to it… 」

「Hey, you! I already said I won't fight the gods! Don't talk as if I'm going to do just that. 」

Toward Hajime's displeased voice, Mildy responded with unexpected conviction and seriousness.

「… You will surely fight them. As long as you are who you are…

for sure… you will kill those gods. 」

「… I don't know what you mean. Well, if they try to stop me, then it can't be helped… 」

Hajime was somewhat perplexed. Mildy, who saw his appearance, laughed joyfully.

「Fu fu… that's good… it's fine as long as you live like that… Your choice… will surely… be the best… for this world… 」

Afterward, Mildy Golem's body was wrapped in a pale light. As if made of fireflies, the light scattered and ascended to the heavens. It was as if a dead soul was passing on; it was a mysterious scene.

In that time, Yue slowly approached Mildy Golem and stared at the lights.

「What is it?」

Mildy whispered. Yue, similarly, whispered in return, giving a present to the great "Liberator" who was about to disappear.

「… Thank you for your hard work. You did well.」「… 」

Words of appreciation. She was a great existence that kept waiting for hope at the bottom of darkness; it was a small gift from the living. They may have been improper words coming from someone younger, but they were the only words that came to Yue's mind.

They may have been unexpected for Mildy. Before long, Mildy muttered softly.

「… Thanks.」「… Mm.」

As an aside, behind Yue and Mildy who exchanged words, Hajime said, 「That's enough already, so hurry up and disappear,」 in irritation. Shia said, 「Who's the one who can't read the mood now! Please just be quiet!」 and covered his mouth.

Fortunately, the other two did not notice, so the solemn atmosphere remained.

「… Well then… it's time… from now on… do what you want…

freely…」

Her words were similar to Oscar's. One of the "Liberators," Mildy, became fleeting lights and disappeared into the sky.

Silence engulfed them. Yue and Shia followed the trail of light as it floated up.

「… In the beginning, I thought she had a terrible character, but she was just trying her best.」

「… Mm.」

Yue and Shia spoke in the quiet atmosphere. Even so, there was a man who did not think of Mildy as they did. Hajime spoke to the two with a fed-up expression.

「Haa, that's enough, isn't it? It's about time we moved on. Also, did you really think her mischievousness was a lie? That isn't at the level of an act.」

「Wait, Hajime-san. It's mean to say that about the dead. You really can't read the mood.」

「… Hajime?」

「Even you, Yue… Haa, well, that's fine. But it's not like I can't read the mood, I just don't want to.」

While they were talking, the three noticed a light shoot out from a corner of the room. They walked up to it, jumping onto a floating block that it had fallen to. When they landed, the floating block began to move. It carried the three toward a

shining wall. 「…」

「Wa wa, this is moving. Convenient.」 「… Service?」

Because the floating block suddenly moved, Shia looked about in surprise while Yue tilted her head in doubt. Hajime seemed displeased. They advanced toward the shining wall in 10 seconds and came to a stop 5 meters away. The wall, as if waiting for their arrival, lost its radiance. The wall began to split, revealing a passage with glossy white walls.

The three advanced into the passage. It led to Mildy Raisen's dwelling. After walking for some time, they found a wall with the same patterns found on the door leading to Oscar's dwelling in Orcus Great Labyrinth. They approached the doors which opened up and advanced toward the interior. The floating block had moved forward without stopping toward the wall on the other side.

Beyond the wall was…

「Yahoo, short time no see! It's Mildy-chan!」

A small Mildy Golem.

「「…」」

「See? Look. I thought something like this might happen.」 Yue

and Shia were speechless. Hajime, who had expected this,

looked fed up.

He had seen that both the serious Mildy and the frivolous Mildy were a part of her. The annoying signs and traps were not at a level that a truly serious person could create. Mildy also chose to leave her own soul to test challengers herself, so it was impossible for her to pass on after being defeated once by a challenger. If that truly happened, the trial would be gone after a single clearing.

Because of that, Hajime expected Mildy herself would not have disappeared, even after Mildy Golem was destroyed. His expectations became conviction when the floating block began moving. After all, Mildy was the only one who could control it.

Mildy greeted Yue and Shia, who were looking down silently, in a casual tone.

「Eh? Ehh? Isn't the tension a bit too low～? It's fine to be surprised, you know～? Ahh, or are you so surprised you can't say anything? Then I guess my surprise is a big success～☆」

The small Mildy Golem was designed to be more human-like than the large one. It had a slender body clad in a milk-white robe and wore a white mask. As Mildy said words which ignored the mood, she approached Hajime and the girls. Even now, Yue and Shia looked down, their expressions hidden by their bangs. Because he could read what might happen next, Hajime took a step back.

It was unknown whether Yue or Shia asked, but a question was muttered.

「… Before?」

「Hmm～? That thing a while ago? Ah, did you really think I was gone? No way, no way～! That's impossible～!」

「Didn't you disappear into the light?」

「Fu fu fu, wasn't it well done? My, Mildy-chan truly has talent as an actress! What a frightening woman!」

Mini Mildy's tension was growing. It shot up in proportion to their annoyance. Yue thrust her hand out in front of Mini Mildy while Shia prepared Drücken. As expected, Mini Mildy stopped moving while saying, 「Eh? Did I overdo it?」

「U, umm…」

Mini Mildy's head slowly moved as Yue and Shia approached her, swaying. She then said the only words she could think of.

「Tehe, Pero ☆」 「… Die.」

「Please die.」

「W, wait! Please wait! This body is weak! It would be bad if you destroy it! Calm down! I apologize!」

For a while, screams of destruction and pain could be heard. Hajime ignored them and observed the room. It was white all over; there was nothing except a magic circle carved on the floor in the center. There was also a door-like object on one part of the wall. Hajime guessed Mildy's dwelling was on the other side.

Hajime slowly approached the magic formation and examined it. Mini Mildy panicked as she drew close to Hajime. From behind, the expressionless Vampire Princess and rabbit-eared girl approached.

「You～ It's not good to examine it without permission. Rather, they're your companions! Please, don't just ignore them, stop them!」

While complaining, Mini Mildy hid behind Hajime and used him as a shield.

「… Hajime, please move aside. I won't kill her.」

「Please stand back, Hajime-san. I will kill her, here and now.」「I didn't think I'd hear those lines with this timing. Rather, stop

playing around and do it already.」

Hajime gave his advise, amazed at Yue and Shia's softness. Behind him, Mini Mildy said, 「Right, right, do it seriously!」only to be grasped by his artificial arm. Meki Meki Meki, he put more power into his arm, hearing cracks coming from Mini Mildy's head.

「It won't be pleasant if this keeps up, so hurry up and hand over the Age of the Gods Magic.」

「Umm～ Did you notice your speech and behavior are like a villain's 『Meki Meki Meki,』I understand! I'll hand it over

immediately! So stop! I really will break at this rate!」

Perhaps less bitter having seen that Mini Mildy was incapable of doing anything more than flail about, Yue and Shia regained their composure. Mini Mildy, understanding she would truly be destroyed if she continued joking around, began to activate the magic formation.

The three entered the magic circle. Since Mildy herself knew they had cleared the trial, there was no need to search their memories like in 【Orcus Great Labyrinth;】the information on how to use the Age of Gods Magic was directly carved into their minds. Though Hajime and Yue, having experienced this before, did not show any reaction, Shia jumped up at the unfamiliar experience.

Everything ended after a few seconds. They had easily obtained Mildy Raisen's Age of the Gods Magic.

「This is… like I thought, magic to manipulate gravity.」

「That's right～ Mildy-chan's magic is Gravity Magic. Use it well… is what I want to say, but you and that rabbit don't have any aptitude～ It's at a level that even I'm surprised!」

「Noisy. I knew that much.」

Just as she said, Hajime and Shia, who had information on Gravity Magic carved into their brains, were unable to fully utilize it. It was the same as how Yue was barely able to use Creation Magic; it was all a matter of aptitude.

「Well, the rabbit should be able to adjust her weight. As for you… since you can use Creation Magic, you can figure something out yourself. The girl over there has the aptitude. She can master it with training.」

Having heard Mini Mildy's somewhat serious explanation, Hajime could only shrug his shoulders. Yue nodded, and Shia looked broken hearted. She was told she had no aptitude for the Age of Gods Magic that she finally obtained. She could only use it to adjust her weight, so she really was disappointed. Furthermore, it was out of the question to make herself lighter. If she was negligent, it would make her figure poor. Rather burdened by its demerits… Shia could only feel depressed.

After casting a skeptical gaze at the depressed Shia, Hajime made more demands. There was no need to be reserved at all.

「Hey, Mildy. Give us the proof already. Then give me all your convenient artifacts and any unusual materials you have like that Induction Stone.」

「… You, aren't those the words of a thief? Are you aware of it?」 Hajime could feel her glare through her mask, but ignored it. Mini Mildy pulled out a ring from her chest pocket and threw it at Hajime. Hajime caught it; Raisen's ring had ellipses at the top

and bottom with a stake piercing through them.

Mini Mildy immediately made numerous stones appear from empty space. She likely had a "Treasure Warehouse" as well. She took out the ores stored inside. Seeing her obediently take them out, she had likely decided to hand them over beforehand. Mildy was convinced

Hajime would fight against the mad gods, so she did not mind cooperating this much.

However, it was Hajime Quality not to be satisfied by this much. After putting away all the minerals inside his own “Treasure Warehouse,” Hajime turned a cold gaze to Mini Mildy.

「Hey, isn’t that “Treasure Warehouse?” If so, hand that over, too. There are probably some artifacts inside.」

「H, hey, you～ I won’t hand over any more than this. The “Treasure Warehouse” and these other artifacts are needed to maintain the Labyrinth.」

「Like I care. Hand them over.」「Ah, hey, I said no!」

Because Hajime was truly trying to take it from her, Mini Mildy retreated impatiently. All the artifacts she owned were necessary for the Labyrinth. Rather, they were only useful for it, so there was no need for Hajime to have them. Having heard this, Hajime simply said,「Ho ho, I see. Hand them over,」without mercy. No matter what, it was daylight robbery.

「I told you already! I won’t hand them over! Go away already!」 Mini Mildy turned around and ran with all her might toward the wall. She stood on a floating block and moved to the ceiling.

「Don’t run away. I just want a proper reward for conquering the

Labyrinth. This is a legitimate demand.」

「If you have the nerve to say that, then please do something about your sense of values! Uu, to make me say something that O-chan usually said…」

「By the way, my sense of values was cultivated inside that O-chan's Labyrinth.」

「O-chan～!!」

While she looked at Hajime with a shocked expression, Yue and Shia, still holding a grudge over being toyed with, entered the fray. The three narrowly surrounded Mildy. Though half of it was because she had reaped what she had sown, Mildy felt the other half was the fault of her former comrade who made them this way in his Labyrinth.

「Haa～ to have such abnormal people as my first challengers…

Honestly, no more. I will send you out by force! Don't come again!」

While Hajime and the girls seemed as if they would jump at her at any time, Mildy grasped a string that hung from the ceiling and

pulled it.

「「「?」」」

For a moment, the three wondered what she was doing, but they heard an unpleasant sound they were familiar with.

Gakon!!

「「「!?」」」

It was the sound of a trap being activated.

At that moment, water gushed out of the four walls with tremendous velocity. It was like a flash flood which came from above, filling the room in no time. The magic formation in the center sunk like an antlion nest; there was a hole in the center; the rapid current rushed toward the hole.

「Bastard! This is!」

Hajime stiffened for a moment noticing something. His face became one filled with humiliation.

A white room with a hole in the middle of it with large amounts of water whirling about… this was just like a “Toilet!”

「Unpleasant things should be flushed ☆」

By some unknown principle, Mini Mildy winked as a smiling face appeared on her mask.

Yue and everyone tried to fly upward in this irritating atmosphere. There was the formation for Age of Gods Magic, and there was no magic dispersal. They would be able to escape from the swift current, even if Yue had only a little magic remaining.

「“Soa…”」

「Like I’d let you~!」

The moment before Yue could use “Soar,” Mini Mildy thrust out her right hand, an extraordinary pressure assaulting the three. They sunk into the rapid current as if pressed by something gigantic. She had used her Gravity Magic to multiply gravity several-fold.

「See ya～ Good luck on conquering the other Labyrinths～ 」
「Gopo… Bastard, you’re calling us trash!? I’ll destroy you one day!」

「Keho… Unforgivable.」

「Now you’ve done it! Fuga!」

Everyone left their parting remarks as they were swept by the rapid current into the hole. A moment before they reached the hole, Hajime tried to retaliate by throwing something. They were then flushed out of the hole along with the water. The floor returned to normal, and the room regained its former appearance.

「Fuu, they were strong～ Even so, a Transmuter just like O-chan, huh? Fu fu, somehow, it’s like destiny. Keep struggling for your wish… well then, I’ll be busy repairing the golems and the Labyrinth for a while… Hmm? What is that?」

Mini Mildy gestured to wipe her forehead, even without the ability to sweat. She then discovered an object unfamiliar to her at the periphery of her vision. A knife was stuck in the wall with a black object hanging from it. 「What is this?」she thought as she approached, recalling it when she was close by.

「Eh!? This is, don’t tell me!?」

The black object was Hajime’s hand made grenade. It was the only

form of retaliation he had at the time; he threw a knife with a grenade attached before being flushed out of the hole. Because he had used it many times inside the Labyrinth, Mildy knew it was an explosive, so she immediately floated away to take refuge. As it was, Mini Mildy herself had poor magic consumption when using Gravity Magic; she had spent most of it bringing them here. For that reason, she was unable to suppress the explosion.

Though Mini Mildy turned to run, she was too late. At that moment, the white room was filled with a flash of light followed by an intense impact.

「Hinyaaa!!」A woman's scream echoed through the Labyrinth. Afterward, the small golem was in serious need of repairs as she sat there weeping…

As for those who were flushed like filth and swept away by the rapid current, they had no place to breathe, so they could only advance while submerged in the water. Though unskillfully, they desperately managed to control their bodies so they would not crash into a wall and lose consciousness.

At that time, many shadows passed by. They were fish. They had been swept into an underground waterway that connected to rivers and lakes; however, unlike the three who were washed away, the fish boldly swam within the rapid current and passed them by.

One of the fishes swam beside Shia's face who was desperately trying to not breathe. It looked toward Shia.

It had eyes. The fish, no, the fish with a human face had the eyes of an old man. Because it likely did not know how to speak, it said nothing. Shia's eyes met those of the human-faced fish. It had an impudent and lethargic feeling.

Shia, surprised, covered her mouth in a panic as she unintentionally let out her breath; however, she was so surprised that she could not avert her gaze. Shia and the old man (fish) continued to advance down the rapid current while staring at one another.

The flow of time seemed to continue forever between the two, but it abruptly ended. A voice suddenly resounded in Shia's head.

— What are you looking at?

It clicked its tongue. This time, Shia was unable to endure. Within the water, she let out her breath in a grand manner. The old man (fish) was likely a demon of some sort. It probably had a unique magic similar to "Telepathy." However, before this could be confirmed, the old man (fish) swam through the rapid current and went ahead with surprising agility.

What it left behind was a rabbit-eared girl who had lost her power.

A carriage with several horses advanced peacefully along the highway that connected multiple villages. There were people riding these horses. They were three men and a woman dressed as adventurers. On the carriage, sitting on the coach seat, was a 15 or 16 year old girl and a monster… it was a giant (wo)man.

「Sona-chan～ We'll reach a spring soon, so let's take a little break～」

「Okay, Crystabel-san.」

The (wo)man called Crystabel was the manager of the clothing store in Brook whom Yue and Shia were indebted to. The girl sitting next to Crystabel was the inn girl from "Masaka Inn," Sona Masaka. Though her name was always a surprise for anyone, she was a normal girl who was curious and had quite a number of pink elements in her brain.

The two were currently returning to Brook from a neighboring town, escorted by adventurers. Because it was easily seen that Crystabel was as strong as an ogre, she was able to harvest a lot of clothing materials by herself. She had gone to gather large quantities of materials in one go and left town. Sona took advantage of it and left with Crystabel, representing her parents to visit a relative in a neighboring town who was recently injured. The adventurers, originally from Brook, had finished their job and decided to join as escorts.

There was only 1 day left of traveling until they reached the town. Crystabel and the others decided to rest at the spring on the side of the highway, despite it being the middle of the day.

The group who arrived at the spring prepared to have lunch at the levee after letting the horses drink water. Sona, who wanted to get some water, approached the edge of the spring. The moment she scooped some water out, Gopoh! Gopo Gopo Gopan!! She suddenly heard sounds as bubbles spouted from the center of the spring.

「Kyaa!」

「Sona-chan!」

Sona screamed and fell on her butt, and Crystabel immediately picked her up in one arm and returned to the adventurers. Even at that time, the bubbles became more intense; finally, a water column higher than 10 meters shot up.

The spring was well known as a resting place along the highway, and such a phenomenon had never once been reported. Crystabel, Sona, and the adventurers could only watch in stunned silence. After that,

「Dowaaaa!!」

「Nnn!!」「…」

From the water spout, without losing momentum, came three people… Two people could be heard screaming. 「What in the world!」Crystabel said. The three people that were thrown more than 10 meters in the sky were thrown to the opposite side.

「「「「「…」」」」」

「Wh, what just happened…」

The adventurers and Crystabel were speechless. Sona's words represented everyone's thoughts.

「Geho Geho～～ That was terrible. I'll definitely destroy her next

time. Yue, Shia, you okay?」

「Keho, Keho… Mm, I'm fine.」

Having somehow managed to get to the water's surface, Hajime confirmed Yue and Shia's safety after cursing. However, only Yue responded.

「Shia? Hey, Shia! Answer me!」「Shia… Where are you?」

Even as they called out to her, there was no sign of her in the surroundings. Hajime quickly dove underwater to search for her. As he expected, Shia had sunk to the bottom. Having lost her consciousness, she was unable to float due to Drücken's weight.

Hajime took out an extremely heavy compressed mineral from "Treasure Warehouse" and used it as a weight to dive quickly. He then carried Shia up.

He dragged Shia to shore. She lay upside down, her face pale and the whites of her eyes visible. Her breathing and pulse had stopped. Perhaps because she had seen something unpleasant, she fell unconscious with her face looking like it had a cramp in it.

「Yue, quick, CPR!」「C… eh?」

「Ah～ I was telling you to secure her breathing…」「???」

Seeing Shia's condition, he told Yue to do CPR, but Yue clearly did

not know what it was. It probably did not exist in this world. Since there was no wound, drinking Holy Water would not be helpful. Yue was weak at Recovery Magic, so she could not possibly have known any magic that could help in this situation or had a means of doing a heart massage.

Though it was not known when exactly she lost consciousness, there was no time to argue. Hajime, with grim determination, performed CPR on the unconscious Shia.

Naturally, there was the mouth-to-mouth portion of it, too. Yue became displeased seeing it, but she understood there was

no other means of saving Shia, so she silently watched. She just stared at him.

Hajime ignored Yue's inorganic gaze with all his might and continued.

(Geez, you can't be dying after everything's over… Honestly, you really are a shameless one.)

Hajime smiled bitterly in his mind. After performing artificial respiration for some time, Shia finally spat out some water. Hajime turned her to the side so it would not block her trachea; it looked as if he was covering her body.

「Keho, Keho… Hajime-san?」

「Yeah, it's Hajime-san. Honestly, don't die because of somethi!?」

While expressing his amazement toward Shia who was lying down and choking, Hajime had a somewhat relieved expression. Shia, who could only blankly stare at Hajime suddenly held him close and kissed him. It was unexpected, so Hajime failed to avoid it.

「Nn!? Nn!!」

「Mm, Nn!」

Shia held Hajime's head with both hands, wrapping her legs around his waist, and holding him without reservation as her tongue invaded his mouth. Hajime was unable to shake off Shia who was using her massive strength to hold him.

In all honesty, Shia realized she was kissing Hajime during the artificial respiration; however, she was unable to move her body. It likely happened because she used body strengthening the moment she had drowned.

Having kissed many times, Shia's feelings were blown away. She completely latched onto his body so he could not escape, then lost herself and returned the kiss.

Yue, on the other hand, saw this… and was confused as well as displeased. Though she was displeased, she did not try to stop it. 「Only this time, as a reward… 」she whispered. Apparently, she had taken Shia's feelings into consideration and allowed it for her hard work in the Labyrinth.

The light had disappeared from her eyes; it was clear she was considerably conflicted. Surely tonight, Hajime would not get any rest as she would become a spoiled child… probably.

「Wh, wh, what!? What's with this situation!? A, Amazing…

they're wet and entangled… so, so intense… even though it's outside! H, How perverse!」

That was conclusion Sona, the inn girl, made from her excessive delusions. 「My, I believe you're…」 Crystabel said while recalling Yue and Shia. With flames of envy within their eyes, the male adventurers desperately tried to control themselves from drawing their swords while the female adventurer looked at them with cold eyes.

With Shia stuck to him, Hajime lifted his body up. He strongly

grasped Shia's plump buttocks. 「Ah!」

Shia unintentionally sighed. The next moment, without loosening his grasp, Hajime pulled Shia away and threw her into the spring.

「Ukyaa!」

While watching Shia being dropped into the spring as she screamed, Hajime fixed his hair, his breathing rough.

「Can't be careless at all. Attacking right after resuscitation… even I can't read that move.」

Toward Shia who was immediately crawling out of the spring, Hajime had a fearful expression.

「Uu～ That was mean～ Even though you also did that～」

「Haa? That was a life saving action… Rather, you were conscious then?」

「Mm～ Though I could only feel it… I somehow knew what was happening. To think Hajime-san would kiss me, U he he.」

「Stop with that creepy laugh … Listen, to the very end, that was a life -saving measure, there was no other meaning behind it, got it? Don't expect anything from it, okay?」

「Is that so? But a kiss is a kiss. At this rate, your kind side will come even sooner.」

「Never. Rather, Yue, help me to stop her.」

「… Just this time… since Shia worked hard… no, but…」「Yue～? Yue-san, yay～」

Yue looked at empty space while murmuring to herself. Hajime was only able to sigh, thinking, 「This is hopeless.」He then looked at Crystabel and the others who had approached to check on the three.

His gaze moved from the adventurers, stopped for a moment on Sona, then he saw Crystabel. He returned his gaze to Sona. He did

not want to see that.

Having been looked at by Hajime, Sona's body twitched and shook; her face blushed.

「S, Sorry for interrupting! P, please don't worry about us and continue!」

Crystabel picked Sona up by the scruff of her neck as she turned to run away. The group then approached. Because of the monster approaching them, Hajime tried to pull out Donner but stopped when he heard Shia call out as if they were acquaintances.

As a result, they discovered that they were 1 day away from Brook. Hajime and the girls decided to return to town. They took advantage of Crystabel's carriage and changed their clothes on the way. While talking about various things, they advanced beneath the warm sunlight.

Together, with a new companion, Hajime had conquered the second Labyrinth. While laying down inside the wagon and watching the brilliant sunlight, Hajime thought about what would happen on his journey from now on and smiled.

Epilogue

「Only you are suited to be the true Hero.」

The words sounded extremely plain beneath the light of the half moon. The man looked at the hand held out to him, his eyes narrow.

「I, I…」

In response to the person speaking to him, he swallowed his own words. He knew he was at a crossroad in his life, and he was conscious of the danger and the temptation.

Looking about the surroundings, there were many demons. He was away from the Capital of【Hairihi Kingdom.】He was currently at the【Northern Mountain Ranges】near【Lake Town Ul.】He came here in the middle of the night because he wanted to change his weakness. He was pleased to be summoned to another world, a chosen one, and he had been bestowed with a foul talent, but he could not accept that he was a “supporting actor.”

Above all, he could not accept there was a Hero beyond himself. That was why he wanted to gather strong demons at his side, so others would recognize him.

But he felt his limits. If he accepted this, he might be able to fulfill his hopes. He had run away, as did the others. But the Hero was on the front lines still, pulling further and further away from him. He wanted to go back, he wanted to get stronger, but he lost to his fear and ran from the Great Labyrinth, unable to catch up. He persuaded himself that there would be some method, he was “sure” of it, he believed in it. But he was uneasy, impatient, and resignation was

born here.

That was why, when someone told him 「Only you are special,」 his mind shook strongly.

… Even if the compensation was something irreparable.

「Y, you really can make me the Hero? You won't betray me later?」

「Yes. You have been suppressed until now, but you will become one if you come with me; you will show the residents of the town and the "Goddess of Fertility," you will make them believe you, and you will be accepted by us as the Hero. We can't betray you. There is no one else. Because you are "special," we wish to invite you to our side.」

「… A hero. Just like in a story…」

The man received those words and swallowed his saliva again. A dark flame of ambition smouldered in his eyes. The desire which lurked in the muddy waters of his mind spouted outward. He could not conceal his excitement, he simplyp nodded while licking his lips.

「… Fine. I'll become your hero.」

In every respect, his expression was one distorted in ugliness. 「Good. Good to be working with you from now on… Hero.」 The one to invite the man laughed tenderly, only thinking about

the carnage that would be wrought in the future.

In a corner of the 【Northern Mountain Range,】 two shadows concluded their conversation with only the demons watching quietly beneath the light of the half moon.

Extra Chapter

Inside a forest where the fog spread wide, a small shadow could be seen.

The blue-gray hair seemed to assimilate into the white fog, the fog stirring lightly as if reflecting the feelings of sadness; 「Gusu, higu」 the shadow cried while running.

A 5, 6 year old child ran alone through 【Hartsenna Sea of Trees,】 a stray child at a glance who would easily become food for demons.

But there was no need to worry about this child.

Because the crying child had rabbit ears. This child was from the Rabbit Clan, a Demi-human living in this Sea of Trees.

The Rabbit Clan was famous as the weakest Demi-human race; but in exchange, their crisis perception and presence manipulation were the greatest. This did not change, even for a child. There was no one who could escape the detection of their rabbit ears.

Furthermore, this child had a unique ability amongst the Rabbit Clan. For these two reasons, it was remarkably low that this child would be exposed to danger.

As a result, this crying rabbit-eared girl safely reached her village. The fog cleared up, and a dense wooden fence could be seen around

a village of Demi-humans. So as not to see the inside easily, the fence was at least 3 meters tall.

For the Rabbit Clan whose main choices were to run away as a group or hide individually, this fence was particularly important, allowing them to confirm the situation outside the village.

Thinking about it, the fence was abnormally large. Though it put an emphasis on defense, the spread was abnormal and showed no obvious focus on defensive ability. It was as if it was not made with the priority of preventing things from entering but to prevent others from peering in.

This young rabbit-eared girl looked about the abnormal fence surrounding the village and ran to the entrance. The rabbit-eared guard said nothing in consideration of the girl.

「Oh, what's wrong, Shia? Your rabbit ears are so wilted. 」 The young rabbit-eared girl — the 5 year old Shia — ran further

into the room, noticed by a woman with dark blue hair and a strong, gentle gaze.

「Mom!! 」

Shia cried in the embrace of her mother — Mona Haulia.

「Gue, 」 the woman groaned as Shia clung to her, but Shia did not mind and simply rubbed her running nose and tear-filled eyes against Mona's chest.

The native clothing of the Rabbit Clan had a lot of exposure. For the women, the default was an upper similar to a bathing suit and a short skirt. Wearing too many clothes would be an obstacle when escaping, and the rustling of clothing would reveal their location. The temperature in the Sea of Trees did not change much throughout the year, and it the fog was present all year round, so it was not a problem that they were lightly dressed.

「Fueee～」Mona called out seeing her daughter seriously crying, rubbing her drool and snot all over her plump chest. Despite suffering pain from the charge, she simply pat her daughter's head.

Mona pacified Shia with watery eyes, waiting for her beloved daughter to calm down.

But Shia did not speak. Rather, she looked up at Mona while sniffling.

「Mom… I… am I a demon? Am I a monster?」「… Shia.」

She heard her child say such a terrible thing, but she was more aware of Shia's uniqueness than anyone.

It was not just her hair that was different amongst those of the Rabbit Clan. She had "Magic Manipulation" and the unique magic "Premonition," making her different from all Demi-humans.

Except to maintain one's magic power, all races, whether it be

Human, Demi-human, or Devil, no one had the ability to manipulate magic directly; it was a power exclusive to demons. They were objects of hatred amongst all races.

That was why the Haulia made a fence which made it difficult to see inside the village. They wanted to raise Shia in the village as much as possible before her existence came to light. If the Demi-human country 【Felbergan】found out, Shia would surely be executed.

Rather, if not for the Rabbit Clan being an especially affectionate clan, Shia would have been executed the day she was born. Because the Haulia Family put a significant effort despite the risks, Shia was able to live up until now.

But no matter how much the adults watched their surroundings, a young child would never b e satisfied staying in this small village.

She could not help but want to go outside the fence…

「Shia… you left the village again.」「Uu… I'm sorry, mom. But, but…」

Seeing Shia look down, Mona smiled wryly. Shia frequently hid herself and explored the village surroundings; someone may have seen her.

Though the dense fog did not drive the senses of a demi-human mad, it still hindered vision. No matter how interested Shia was in the outside world, if her existence was known, the entire family

would be in trouble. Because she knew this, her ability to hide her presence and detect others was better than an adult's.

That was why Shia's existence had yet to be discovered. It was also the reason Shia felt bad.

「A white shadow lurks in the Sea of Trees. Even if you chase after it, it disappears like a phantom, and you can't catch up. Is it a new demon? Is it something that has existed in the Sea of Trees for a long time? Is it simply biding its time? Does it have rabbit ears?」

「Uu, mom… you knew?」

Shia's rabbit ears and eyes opened wide in surprise, and Monda nodded with a wry smile as she played with Shia's ears. Mona spoke of a small rumor she had heard from others. It was something of an urban legend, a trivial rumor. Many stories like t his spread through the Sea of Trees, so there was little cause for concern.

But Shia had never heard of rumors about rabbit ears until now, so she was shocked. She knew she was different, and she knew she had a similarity to demons, but she did not know to what extent.

Am I different from my family? Not a demon, not a person, what am I?

Tears collected at her eyes once again, and Shia began sniffling. Seeing her beloved daughter doubt her own existence, Mona kindly and sternly looked at Shia.

「Shia. Is there a problem if you're a monster?」

「Fue? I, I don't want to be.」「Why?」

「W, why…」

Shia was confused by this question with an unknown intent. Her rabbit ears moved about in confusion. Seeing her mother's gaze, she tried to look away, but Mona softly held her cheeks and continued looking at her.

「… Being different from others, it's a scary, lonely, sad thing. But Shia. Your mom envies you. You should be happy about it..」

「… Why?」

「But you're different, right? You're special, aren't you? That's amazing.」

Shia wiped her tear-filled eyes, not understanding what Mona was saying.

「Amazing? Mom, what would you do if you were me?」「Fu fu, your mom, since young, she wanted to be hero.」「Hero?」

In truth, Mona's body was a weak one. Hearing her sickly mother's wish, Shia blinked in surprise. Eventually, she nodded while thinking「That really is like mom.」

「Right, a hero. I want to become a person who can protect her family. Not just that, I want to be someone who can confront those

who take from others, that kind of person.」

For the Rabbit Clan who loves peace, it was a fairly strong will to fight. This woman had this burning thought in her heart, overturning her own racial characteristic. But her body was ironically weak from birth. Though she had the will to fight, though her mind was stronger than anyone else, f ate gave her the weakest body of the weakest race. What else could it be but irony?

But that was why she thought this way.

「My child, Shia, you were born to be the “strongest.” How could I not be happy?」

「Mom…」

Mona happily boasted of Shia as her greatest trial and firmly embraced her.

「Shia. What is a person? What is a demon? They’re just words. What do you want to be? You only need to decide. You only have to be what you want to be. You’re not just someone from the Rabbit Clan. You’re different from us, you can choose

where you want to go.」「…」

A burning desire full of strength and love filled the eyes of this mother who looked straight at her. Perhaps charmed, Shia silently returned her gaze.

To Shia, Mona began talking of the future like a prophet.

「Shia. No matter how different you are, something good is waiting for you in the future. Even so, you will go through many hardships.」

「Uu… Mom!」

Shia was obviously anxious. But Mona spoke sternly in order to persuade her child.

「But you have the power to break it all. So Shia, do not hate yourself. Be bright. Be healthy. The bad things, the cruel things, laugh all of them away. “I am Shia Haulia, any complaints?” Thrust out your chest with pride. If you do that, everything will be fine.」

「Everything will be fine?」 「Yes.」

「Uu, I’ll try.」

「Fu fu, good girl.」

「Mu mu,」 Shia groaned. It seemed she would make an effort. Seeing her beloved daughter act so cutely, Mona smiled

somewhat mischievously, the previously serious atmosphere gone.

「Right, right, Mom has one more thing to say, about the future.」

「?」

「Some day, you will surely meet someone. Maybe someone from the Rabbit Clan, maybe someone who isn’t even a Demi-human. Somewhere outside the Sea of Trees… right, I’m sure there are “similar” people.」

「The same as me?」

「Yes, I'm sure of it. You will definitely meet them.」

Though Mona did not have the ability to see the future, her words were filled with conviction. Shia tilted her head in doubt.

「Because if Shia was the only one with this constitution… it would be too lonely. The world, though harsh, can be very kind. So I'm sure you'll meet someone. Perhaps you will give yourself to them completely」

「… Outside the Sea of Trees, there is someone like that…」「Of course. Fu fu, it is possible that person may be your future

husband.」

「Fue? M, my husband!?」

「And I'm sure you'll find a girl you can call your best friend, you'll probably fight over him.」

「Fight…!?」

Mona was happy thinking about Shia's future. Shia could not overlook the important key words that had come at her in rapid succession, even as a young girl, so her rabbit ears were at attention.

Rather, the shock had caused her to forget about the rumors, and the conversation with her mother quickly became girls' talk. She thought about her future friend and husband and blushed until Cam came back.

Seeing Shia like this, like a girl who had entered puberty and fallen in love, Cam seemed lonely… but this was normal at the time. Surely Mona and Shia would never expect he would later run around killing demons while screaming 「Hyahaaa!」

「Nn…」

In a room where the lively noises did not reach, a girl's moan could be heard. Beyond the sound of the sheets rubbing together, a yawn could be heard.

「Nhee, it's already morning?」

「Idiot, it's already afternoon. You really overslept. Shameless rabbit.」

Shia muttered to herself, still half asleep, but her rabbit ears stood up hearing the unexpected response.

Then she caught sight of Hajime who was gazing at her from the nearby window.

「Eh? Why is Hajime-san here? Ha, it can't be, night crawling!?」
「I'm pretty sure I said it's afternoon. Yue went out to go

shopping. We promised to go together, but you wouldn't wake up, no matter how much I shook your or even if I shocked you. She ended up going alone.」

「Is, is that so? I'm sorry, we were all supposed to go… eh, huh? So

why is Hajime-san here again?」

Yue had gone shopping, and Hajime had remained here. Shia doubted her rabbit ears and looked at Hajime who looked like he had just chewed on something bitter. 「That clothes shop manager… I can't handle that one.」Apparently, even having conquered 【Raisen Great Labyrinth,】he was weak to the clothing shop manager in 【Brook.】Not wanting to meet the manager, he gave up on his date with Yue.

「Even though she's a good person,」Shia said as she looked at Hajime and smiled in embarrassment. Perhaps she had seen the nostalgic dream having met that 「monster」again.

「… What is it, Shia?」「Eh?」

Before she noticed, Hajime was quietly looking at her. Apparently he had seen through her thoughts. She felt a little happy; while thinking about what to say, Hajime asked, 「Is it about

your mother?」「Eh!?」

「It can't be, he has a unique magic to read minds!?」she thought hearing him guess correctly. Her rabbit ears moved down and she held her plump breasts, her mother's heirloom, firmly in both arms as she tried to avoid having her thoughts read.

「You were talking in your sleep… you called out to your

mother.」

「Ah… so that's it. Well~ A ha ha, it's a little embarrassing to call out to my mother when I'm sleeping like that.」

Hajime quietly looked at Shia and shrugged as if accepting something before looking away.

「Looks like it wasn't a bad dream…」

Shia's rabbit ears and tail fluttered about happily.

「Yes, it's a cherished memory. My mom died before I turned 10 from sickness. She was someone with a weak body, and she lived for less than 10 years after giving birth to me.」

「Is that so?」

「Yes. But it's not like we were separated when being chased away from the Sea of Trees. Since there was a proper farewell, I guess you don't need to worry so much?」

「I wasn't particularly worried.」

Seeing Hajime like this, she said 「You're not honest at all」 as she tried to twine her arms around him, only to be subjected to a forehead flick. While rubbing her red forehead with watery eyes, she was still happy.

「… Sooner or later, I'll talk to you and Yue about my mother. Will you listen?」

When they first met, she had worked hard to see a future he desired. Perhaps, because of this, she recalled her conversation with her mother. But she was different from back then, she was proud. How proud of her mother was Shia? Hajime could only guess.

「… I don't particularly care. Do what you want. We'll be in this town for a bit longer, so talk if you want to.」

「E he he. Yes.」

Shia's rabbit ears and tail shook happily. Hajime, on reflex, grabbed at them… of course, there was no particular meaning, it was just an impulsive action to touch her soft ears. At that time,

「… Flirting prohibited.」

「Ahh, Yue. You came back.」

「Wa wa wa, that's a surprise, Yue-san」

For some time, Yue had appeared with an expressionless face outside the window. She had a bag in hand; she had finished shopping and returned immediately.

Hajime immediately jumped out the window. The two loked at Shia.

Bright light hardly seen in the Sea of Trees, the clamor of merchants, adventurers, and residents. Shia knit her eyes in pleasure and stepped lightly.

Many sad things had happened, and there were futures which she could not change, no matter how hard she worked. She had lost many “important” things. But it was as Mona had said. She had a meeting. This meeting saved her family. It came from her hard work. And now, there are many of the Rabbit Clan with a will to fight, just like Mona had before.

— You can become anything.

The voice of her mother echoed in her mind. She could say with certainty she did not hate being a monster.

「Hajime-san, Yue-san.」

「What?」「Hm?」the two in front of Shia who she came to love turned around, causing Shia to smile.

「I, I’m glad I’m a monster.」

She smiled with her whole face, declaring what she was. Hajime and Yue looked at each other in surprise.

Rather than sympathy, they were a little happy. And with Shia following them,

「Get up here, you troublesome rabbit. There are a lot of bastards here who will be after you.」

「… Mm. Stay nearby. Don’t act alone. It’ll be troublesome finding you.」

Contrary to their words, their expressions were soft. Shia understood she was accepted here, even if they could not express it well in words.

Shia’s rabbit ears and tail were moving extremely fast. 「Then I’ll be intruding!!」

「Hey, you. Who said you could get between Yue and me?」「… Shia, that’s some courage. I hope you’re ready to handle

what’s to come.」

Shia took their hands, ignoring their protests, enjoying the sun at its peak and the clamor of the town.

(Mom, I’ve met my future husband and best friend. I’m not quite there yet, but… Shia Haulia will do her best!!)

Shia swore to herself in her mind, hoping it would reach her mother’s soul.